

What is exercise-induced asthma?

Exercise-induced asthma, or EIA, occurs during exercise, when air passages are narrowed due to an increase in breathing. This increased breathing causes the lining of the air passages to cool and dry, similar to an asthma attack. In fact, EIA tends to affect people who already have mild asthma, diagnosed or not.

An EIA attack causes tightening of the chest, coughing, some shortness of breath and fatigue when exercising. If you feel an EIA attack coming on, it is best to stop exercising until it has passed. However, never exercising is not the answer; consistent physical exercise helps to strengthen the breathing muscles. Through monitoring your exercise and choosing certain types of fitness routines, you can lessen the chances of EIA.

To start, begin your next exercise routine by warming up with short bursts of activity interspersed with periods of rest. This can help prevent an EIA attack. Then, slowly increase your level of intensity and duration until you have worked through an attack. If you feel you suffer from EIA, it is best to consult a physician or specialist who can offer advice for your specific case.

Finally, choose an exercise that occurs in a warm, moist environment; this helps the air passages from drying out, which contributes to asthma attacks. Swimming is the best choice for those with EIA, followed by riding an indoor bicycle or running on an indoor treadmill. If you run outdoors (one of the worst triggers of EIA), a facemask covering the mouth and nose can help keep cold air out and warm, moist air in.

If you suspect you suffer from any type of asthma, contact your physician. Asthma that is not controlled by medication or other means can lead to permanent bronchial tube damage.

Resources

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health: www.nlm.nih.gov
- American Academy of Allergy Asthma & Immunology: www.aaaai.org

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