



Exercise Induced Asthma (EIA)

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Asthma is defined as a chronic inflammatory disorder of the airways characterized by variable airway obstruction and bronchial hyperresponsiveness. A person with asthma usually has some underlying swelling and an overproduction of sticky mucus in the airways. These two conditions, along with the contraction of muscles around the airways (called a bronchospasm), makes the size of the airway opening smaller and there is less space for oxygen to get through.

Symptoms of asthma include chest tightness, coughing, prolonged shortness of breath, difficulty sleeping, wheezing, and the use of accessory muscles to breathe. A person with asthma may have certain allergens, irritants, or activities that can “trigger” an asthma attack. Often times a person may know what triggers their asthma and efforts can be made to avoid exposure to those triggers when possible. Some common asthma triggers include animal dander, dust mites, tobacco smoke, air pollution (poor air quality), chemicals or strong smells, strong emotions, aerobic exercise, and breathing in cold air.

There are many people without chronic asthma who develop symptoms only during exercise. These individuals are often diagnosed with Exercise-Induced Asthma (EIA). The symptoms of EIA are the same as chronic asthma and generally begin within 5-20 minutes after the start of exercise, or 5-10 minutes after brief exercise has stopped.

People with EIA shouldn't avoid exercising, but steps should be taken for the prevention of asthma symptoms that will allow individuals to maintain normal physical activity. Incorporating good warm-up and cool-down periods into activity can help reduce incidents of asthma attacks. Athletes are advised to make their coaches aware that they have asthma and should have their quick acting inhaler (if prescribed) easily accessible during their activity. It is recommended that athletes with asthma that compete in cold weather wear a mask or scarf to warm the cold air they breathe.

If you find yourself experiencing some of the symptoms listed in this article, you may want to have yourself examined by a physician to determine if you have EIA. Remember, individuals with EIA can still participate physical activity and can even excel in athletic competition.

Additional Asthma Information:

- ✓ The Coach's Asthma Clipboard Program (Winning With Asthma) – www.winningwithasthma.org
- ✓ Minnesota Department of Health (Minnesota Asthma Program) – www.health.state.mn.us/asthma
- ✓ Minnesota Asthma Coalition – www.MNAsthma.org
- ✓ National Athletic Trainers' Association (Position Statement: Management of Asthma in Athletes) - www.nata.org/statements/position/asthma.pdf