

Being Active When You Have Asthma



Do you want to feel better, move better and sleep better? Experts now say that any physical activity counts toward better health – even just a few minutes!

Asthma causes narrowing of the airways that can lead to shortness of breath, wheezing, chest tightness and coughing. Being active reduces how bad and how often asthma attacks occur, resulting in fewer emergency room visits and less worry. As you become more fit, you will be less out-of-breath during activity.

Some people with asthma avoid being active because it may trigger an asthma attack. With lack of exercise, their fitness gets worse, and they have asthma symptoms at even lower levels of activity. With the right medicine and precautions, most people with asthma can safely be active.



Getting Started

Keep It Simple

Sit less and move around more! Walk to the mailbox. Walk the dog. Dance in the kitchen. Take the stairs. Find opportunities to move throughout your day. It all adds up.

Check Your Health

Talk with your health care provider before beginning an exercise program. Ask about any changes in your medications or concerns with becoming more active.

Do Cardio and Strength

Begin with light aerobic activity such as walking. Over time, add strength training. Or, if you've lost muscle from not exercising, start strength training first. No matter which type of activity you begin with, it's smart to include both.

Be Active with a Friend

Do activities that you enjoy and find an activity buddy at home or work. Those who are active with a friend tend to stick with it longer than those who go it alone.

To stay safe and injury free:

- Warm up and cool down at an easy pace for 10 minutes before and after activity. This can reduce your risk of an asthma attack.
- Start with light to medium effort.
- Gradually increase your pace and time spent being active. Start low and go slow!

Asthma Tips and Cautions

Carry a rescue medication (short-acting, beta-2 agonist inhaler) during activity. You should not have to use your inhaler every day. This suggests that your daily medication needs to be adjusted. Talk with your provider.

Be active when you're least likely to have an attack. Mid-to-late morning is often best.

In general, vigorous-intensity activity causes more problems than moderate activity done for a longer time. This is because faster breathing dries the airways quicker.

Cold, dry air is more likely to trigger an attack than warm, moist air. Breathe through your nose at rest and during light activity (or tie a scarf over your nose and mouth) to help warm and humidify the air.

If you are having asthma symptoms, don't start activity until they get better. You need normal airway function to be active safely.

Aerobic Activity

Aerobic activity increases your heart rate and breathing rate. If you have been inactive for a long time, start with a few minutes per session. Build up to at least 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity activity (like a brisk walk, light biking, water exercise or dancing). You'll improve your stamina and heart/lung health.

What?

Any rhythmic, continuous activity!

How often?

3-5 days/week

How hard?

Fairly light to somewhat hard

How much?

30-40 minutes over the day.

Remember: Fit in 5 or 10 minutes here and there. Or go for 20-30 minutes. Be active however and wherever you can. To lose weight, do twice as much.

Aerobic Activity Cautions

- Avoid outdoor activity at the coldest times of the day or when pollution or allergens are at their highest. If the Air Quality Index (AQI) is in the moderate to unhealthy range (> 50), try an indoor activity. If you're active indoors, watch out for smoke or allergens there too.
- The best activities (from least to most likely to trigger an attack) are swimming, walking, cycling and jogging. *Pool chemicals may be very high in indoor pools and breathing these could worsen your asthma.
- Don't exercise at an intensity that is too high for you. It might bring on an asthma attack or increase your risk of injury.
- If an activity makes your symptoms worse, stop right away and contact your health care provider.

Strength Training

Strength training will help make daily and recreational activities easier and safer and improve your health. If you've been taking oral corticosteroid medicine for a long time, you may have lost muscle mass.

What?

Hand weights, resistance bands, weight machines or your own body, e.g., kitchen counter push-ups or chair squats

How often?

2-3 Days/week
*Rest day in between

How hard?

Start with medium effort. Build up to challenging effort.

How much?

8 -12 repetitions (for each major muscle group). Repeat 2-4 times.

Remember: If you need it, get help from a certified exercise professional. They can teach you the right way to do exercises and how to breathe properly.

Other Types of Physical Activity

Aerobic activity and strength training are at the heart of a program for those with asthma. But you may enjoy and benefit from these other options.

Yoga, Tai Chi and Pilates

All help with balance, flexibility and strength and are relaxing too!

Flexibility Exercises

Stretch your muscles 2-3 days/week to the point of feeling tightness. Hold for 10-30 seconds (30-60 seconds for older adults). For example, stretch your calves or thighs.

Take More Steps

Use an activity tracker or smart phone app to measure your progress and stay motivated. Slowly build up to 7,000 - 9,000 steps/day.

Just for Fun

Find ways of being active that are just plain fun. Try pickleball. Dance. Tend your garden. Play with your kids or grandkids. Find what makes you smile and do it often.

More Help

Go to www.acsm.org/get-stay-certified/find-a-pro to find an ACSM certified exercise professional near you.

How will I get started **this week?** _____

