

# Fit Facts

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE

## Exercise and Asthma

Many people with asthma believe exercise is not an option for them, that it will do more harm than good. The truth is that most asthmatics would likely benefit from some form of regular physical activity.

### THE ABC'S OF ASTHMA

Twelve percent to 15 percent of the population are considered asthmatics and suffer recurrent attacks of breathlessness. The severity of an asthma attack can vary greatly, from slight breathlessness to respiratory failure. Common symptoms include wheezing, a dry cough and tightness in the chest. Attacks may be brought on by an allergic response, a respiratory infection, tobacco smoke, air pollutants, anxiety or stress. Exercise induced asthma (EIA) is usually brought on by vigorous aerobic activity.

### EXERCISING WITH ASTHMA

Despite the fact that asthma may be brought on by aerobic activity, exercise may still be a desirable option for many asthmatics. Research indicates that as tolerance for physical exertion is built up over time, it is less likely that an asthmatic will experience an attack during exercise. And, in addition to reducing the risk of developing many other diseases, appropriate exercise can help asthmatics reduce stress, sleep better and feel more energized. It might surprise you to know that even world-class athletes, such as Olympic gold medal Jackie-Joyner Kersee, continue to compete after being diagnosed with asthma.

Have a thorough medical evaluation and obtain your doctor's permission before beginning any

type of exercise program. This is an absolutely essential first step. Your physician may prescribe medications that might further aid in controlling your condition. You will need specific instructions on when to take the medication before exercising and how long the effects will last. Once you have received clearance from your doctor to begin an exercise program, consider the following guidelines:

- Take extra time to warm up before exercising. A prolonged period of low-level aerobic activity will help prepare your body for higher-intensity exercise.



- Exercise toward the lower end of your target heart rate. Exercises such as walking or swimming are great for asthmatics because they are low intensity and may be done for longer periods of time. Those who wish to participate in higher-intensity exercise, such as running or fast-paced sports, should slowly increase intensity over time. Rest when necessary and listen to what your body is telling you. Strength-training

exercises are

unlikely to cause an asthma attack if you rest between sets.

- Avoid exercising in polluted environments, or in cold or dry air.
- Don't rush through your cool down; extending it can help prevent the asthma attacks that occur immediately following an exercise session. A warm bath or shower may also help.

### KEEP YOUR OPTIONS OPEN

Asthma does not necessarily mean you have to live an inactive life. Regular physical activity is one of the best things you can do for both your health and your overall well-being. As long as you and your physician are comfortable with your level of activity, nothing should keep you from doing the activities that keep you happy and healthy.

These exercises are listed in order from most to least likely to induce an asthma attack:

- outdoor running
- treadmill running
- cycling
- walking
- pool swimming

For more information please call the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Physical Activity Hotline  
**1-800-952-6633**

If you are interested in information on other health and fitness topics, contact:

American Council on Exercise, 5820 Oberlin Drive, Suite 102, San Diego, CA 92121, 800-529-8227