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## EXERCISE AND ASTHMA by Jeff Martin, Pharm D

With the longer days and the warm summer air, now is the perfect time to lace up those running shoes, grab a soccer ball, or hop on a bike. But for some people, exercise can trigger shortness of breath, coughing, wheezing and fatigue. Many people might assume that they are having a hard time breathing because they are unfit or out of practice, but in reality, they may have asthma. Exercise can trigger troubled breathing for anyone with asthma. Asthma symptoms usually appear about 10-15 minutes into vigorous activity and may last for hours afterwards.

Exercise is a very common trigger for asthma, even amongst Olympic athletes. People with asthma triggered by exercise may not have any other known asthma symptoms or triggers, except when they exercise. In the past, experts thought that asthma triggered by exercise as a different type of asthma. More recently, the experts feel that patients who have difficulty with their asthma when they exercise may indicate that their asthma is not under good control. They may have problems breathing just like anyone else who is affected by their triggers when they are not under good control. Doctors believe that one of the reasons exercise triggers asthma symptoms is because of very sensitive lungs responding to changes in humidity and air temperature. Normally, when a person is at rest, he or she will breathe in through the nose where the air is then warmed and moistened. During exercise, a person may breathe through his or her mouth which pulls in more air that is cooler and dryer. They also pull in more pollen, mold spores, or dust. In response, the airways may swell, tighten and produce mucus.

It's important to work with your doctor to make sure your asthma is under good control and help prevent any further attacks. Your doctor will give you a full exam to help rule out any other conditions that could be making exercise difficult. He may ask you to take a pulmonary function test before and after exercise. He may also start you on, increase or change your daily medication for use before to exercising.

Even if some types of exercise trigger asthma symptoms, there is no reason to stop exercising. Activities such as swimming, walking, biking, and volleyball are less likely to trigger an asthma attack compared to running, hockey, cross country skiing, basketball, and soccer, but with proper maintenance, you can practice your favorite sport.

While there is no cure for asthma symptoms triggered by exercise, it can be treated successfully by taking the proper asthma medications and making some minor modifications to your workout routine. Wearing a scarf when running outside or taking your medication 5-10 minutes before exercise can make a big difference in how you feel while working out.

Exercise is very important in order to maintain good health. A regular exercise routine can also help reduce stress, lose weight and prevent other chronic conditions. People who have asthma should be as active as they want to be when their asthma is under control. 

*Jeff Martin, Pharm.D. is the Director of Clinical Programs For Innoviant, a PBM based in Wausau, WI which was recently purchased by the United HealthGroup. He is a member of the Board of Directors for the Asthma Network of West Michigan.*

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 80-90% of people with asthma have increased asthma symptoms with exercise.

 1 out of 10 people with no classic features of chronic asthma, still experience symptoms during exercise.

 39% of elite college athletes tested positive for asthma triggered by exercise.

Source: Ohio state University (2007, September). High rate of Asthma found in College Athletes. *Science Daily*. Retrieved July 1, 2008 from [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/09/070905080810.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/09/070905080810.htm)



## **CFC INHALER COUNTDOWN** **Time is Running Out!**

Have you switched over from a CFC to an HFA inhaler? The countdown is on and time is running out. On December 31, 2008, CFC inhalers will no longer be available anywhere.

If you haven't already, now is the best time to switch. Talk to your doctor about switching to an HFA inhaler. It's just as effective and safer for the environment. Visit, [www.transitionnow.org](http://www.transitionnow.org) or [www.lungusa.org/cfcfree](http://www.lungusa.org/cfcfree) for more information.

## **ASK AN ASTHMA** **EDUCATOR** **Guest AE-C,** **Kathleen Slonager**

*"My new HFA inhaler feels different. Am I getting the same amount of medicine and should my technique be different for this inhaler?" -Bonnie from Lansing*

Great Question Bonnie!

Even though the propellants in your inhaler have changed from one having chlorofluorocarbons (or CFCs for short) to one with hydrofluoroalkanes (HFAs), the medicine inside has not. HFA quick-relief albuterol inhalers are FDA-approved and are equally as safe and effective as your current CFC quick-relief albuterol inhaler. While the albuterol inside the HFA inhaler is the same as in the CFC inhaler, there are some differences between the two (such as taste and spray force) and you should expect this as you change your inhaler. For example, the "puff" of the HFA spray will be less forceful than what you may be accustomed to with the CFC inhaler.

If you have questions about your inhalers, it is very important that you talk with your doctor, certified asthma educator, or pharmacist about your concerns, even if you have used an inhaler for years. It is also a good idea to ask about how to clean your new inhaler, especially since HFA inhalers have specific cleaning instructions, provided with the product.

Please direct questions and comments about this newsletter to:  
MI Asthma Communication Network  
c/o American Lung Assoc. of Michigan  
403 Seymour Avenue  
Lansing, MI 48933-1179  
phone: 1-866-395-8647  
e-mail: [info@GetAsthmaHelp.org](mailto:info@GetAsthmaHelp.org)

## **SUMMER ASTHMA TIPS:**



## **Asthma and Thunderstorms**

Quite a few people report having asthma symptoms caused by thunderstorms, but it probably isn't the actual thunderstorm that is triggering those attacks. Most likely, it's the mold and pollen in the air that is causing those symptoms.

According to an article in the scientific journal, CHEST, scientists looked at how many people were admitted to a hospital for asthma during thunderstorms for six years. They also measured common air pollutants and triggers in the air during those days. The scientists found that a lot of mold stirred up and hanging in the air before and during a thunderstorm. It is also possible that there is more tree and grass pollen in the air as well.

No matter what, if you are having symptoms at any time, take your quick relief medicine. Also, talk with your doctor to learn how to better manage your allergies and asthma.

## **NEWSLETTER UPDATE:**

Thank you for reading the latest edition of the AIM Newsletter, ALERT! We have been happy to publish quarterly newsletters for the past 5 years and we want to hear from you, our readers! Visit [www.GetAsthmaHelp.org/newsletter.asp](http://www.GetAsthmaHelp.org/newsletter.asp) and take our online survey about the ALERT newsletter. Tell us what we are doing right and how we can improve. The survey should only a few minutes to complete and your feedback is extremely valuable to us.

If you have any other comments or questions, you can always reach us at [info@getasthmahelp.org](mailto:info@getasthmahelp.org). We look forward to hearing from you!

## **MI ASTHMA CALENDAR**

### August

- 5 Asthma Information Review (AIR) Course  
St. John Macomb Oakland Hospital, Warren, 7:45 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. \$85 for professionals, \$45 for students. For more info: (734) 677-MSRC
- 20 The Silent Epidemic A Back to School Asthma Awareness Dinner Seminar  
MSU University Club, Lansing, 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. \$20 per person, \$25 with guest. Registration required by August 11th. For more info: 517-484-4541

### September

- 9 Summit of Michigan Asthma Coalitions  
LCC-West Campus, Lansing, 9 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Free, but registration required. For more info: 517-484-7206 or 1-866-EZ LUNGS

### October

- 6- MSRC 2008 Fall Conference  
7 Doubletree Riverfront, Bay City, registration required. For more info: 734-677-6772 or [anniec@ucia2.com](mailto:anniec@ucia2.com).
- 15- Michigan's Premiere Public Health Conference  
16 LRadisson Plaza Hotel and Suites, Kalamazoo. For more info: 517-485-0660 or [jzdybel@malph.org](mailto:jzdybel@malph.org)
- 25- CHEST 2008  
30 Philadelphia, PA. Registration required. For more info: <http://www.chestnet.org/CHEST/program/welcome.php>

Visit [www.GetAsthmaHelp.org](http://www.GetAsthmaHelp.org) or call 866-395-8647 for more information about asthma events & trainings in your area.