

Physical Activity and Asthma

This factsheet is for you if you have asthma.

Use the information in this factsheet with the booklet Get Active Your Way. Order your free copy on www.healthpromotion.ie



What is asthma?

Asthma is a condition that makes it very difficult to breathe at times. This happens when the muscles around the airways (tubes) in your lungs tighten due to swelling, inflammation, soreness or irritation.

How can regular physical activity help?

Regular physical activity can help prevent your airways from tightening up. So long as you control your asthma, you can and need to take part in physical activity. If your day to day asthma is well controlled, you should not need to use your reliever inhaler more than twice a week.

You can control your asthma by:

- taking your medication as directed,
- knowing and avoiding your asthma 'triggers', and
- carrying your inhaler with you.

Common triggers include pollens, grass cutting, animal dander (old skin scales like dandruff) and viral infections such as the flu. Others triggers could be endurance sports, long distance running and chlorine (a chemical used to keep swimming pools clean).

Asthma brought on by exercise

Some people experience symptoms of asthma when doing exercise. We are not sure why this happens, but we think it is because people breathe more rapidly, which makes it difficult for their nose and upper airways to warm and add moisture to the air they breathe.

The air getting into their lungs is drier and colder than normal and this cold air triggers symptoms of asthma.

If this happens to you, try **swimming** (if chlorine is not a trigger for you). The warm air in the swimming pool is less likely to trigger your asthma. **Yoga, Tai Chi** or **Pilates** are also good activities as they emphasise relaxation and controlling breathing.

How do I get started?

Use the booklet *Get Active Your Way* to help you make a plan to become more active.

It is recommended to check with your GP before you start becoming more active. They can help you set realistic goals that take into account your level of fitness, symptoms and medication.

To get the most health benefits from physical activity, you need to be physically active at a moderate intensity for at least 30 minutes a day on five days a week (150 minutes a week).



Before you start exercising make sure you:

- tell your coach, team, instructor or training partners that you have asthma
- tell them where you keep your inhaler
- warm up gently before you exercise (and cool down afterwards)

! Important

Remember, don't start an activity if you think you could get an asthma attack – wait until your day to day asthma is under control again.

Useful contacts

www.asthmasociety.ie
www.getirelandactive.ie