



Asthma and Exercise

Sometimes it takes mega-athletes to burst the mega-myth that folks with asthma can't exercise. Jackie Joyner-Kersey is an inspirational example of how, with determination and training, you can achieve the goals that matter most to you.

You don't have to be a professional athlete to benefit from regular exercise. And, you can no longer use the excuse that you can't exercise because you have asthma. Not only does exercise improve your overall health, but the latest research shows it's actually good for your asthma. Why? Aerobic exercise makes your heart and lungs work better. In other words, when you become fit, your body doesn't have to work as hard to breathe. You'll feel the difference on the playing field- and even at home when you're carrying groceries or lifting a toddler, for instance. Exercise also boosts your mood and makes you feel in control of your own body. These are good feelings to have when you struggle with asthma, a disease that can make you feel out of control.

Folks who have what's known as exercise-induced asthma (EIA) can enjoy the same benefits. If they follow the treatment plan provided by their doctor, they may be able to cut down the number of attacks they experience. These tips may also help:

- 1) Talk to your doctor about an appropriate exercise program. You may be advised to modify your treatment plan. Adding steps to your program may stop symptoms during exercise and even hours later, when coughing and chest tightness sometimes happen as a delayed reaction.
- 2) Ease into exercise with the right sports. Don't jump into high gear because getting out of breath too quickly and gulping in air can cause asthma attacks. Instead, choose sports and find a workout pace that will let you build up heart and lung strength slowly. Swimming is an ideal exercise because you breathe in the perfect air- warm and humid- right above the water. Walking, riding a stationary bike,

or doing low-impact aerobics are also good choices because you don't have to push yourself too hard.

- 3) Breathe through your nose as much as possible. Breathing through your nose helps to warm the air and clear out pollutants and other things that trigger attacks.
- 4) Steer clear of triggers. If you have allergies to pollen, for instance, try to avoid exercising near fields or woods in the spring. You may even want to exercise indoors on windy days when lots of pollen is carried in the air. And dodge areas with heavy traffic or factory smoke stacks-you don't want to breathe in fumes.

- 5) Warm up. Start out slowly to loosen muscles and get your heart pumping slightly faster. Once you start to sweat a bit, you can push yourself harder for about 5 minutes. Then, rest. Do this over and over again for about 20 to 40 minutes. This type of workout will keep any wheezing or coughing to a minimum and let you move on to a more intense workout that will be symptom-free.

Another type of warm-up routine involves doing 2- to 3-minute bursts of exercise followed by 3 minutes of rest. This also gets the lungs primed for exercise. Be flexible and listen to your body's limits.

- 6) Drink lots of water before, during, and after exercise. A hot, parched throat can trigger attacks, so staying hydrated is key.

- 7) Wind down with deep breaths. As you start to cool down, be sure to focus on your breathing. Take slow, deep breaths from your belly. This will keep your lungs from twitching, which sometimes happens when you breathe in and out too rapidly and shallowly.