

NEW-LIFESTYLES STEPS TO A HEALTHIER YOUSM ASTHMA FACTS

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At a time when it is more important than ever to adopt physically active lifestyles, more than 20 million Americans face special challenges trying to do so while controlling their asthma. One child in every 15 is trying to overcome the challenges of asthma so that he/she can play with friends and just "be a kid" like the others on the playground or in physical education class.

As health and fitness professionals, we need to recognize asthma sufferers' barriers to physical activity and think of creative ways in which we can help them to be as active as they can be while managing their chronic disease condition in a sensitive way. When it comes to helping those with asthma, the key is to learn about the disease, the conditions that trigger asthma and how to manage these asthma triggers in order to prevent or limit asthmatic episodes.

Asthma episodes can be severe and require that the individual receive emergency treatment in order to restore their breathing to normal. Although a great deal of information regarding asthma is currently available, more research is required to fully understand what causes asthma, how to prevent, treat and possibly cure the chronic condition.

It is important to remember that, with proper management of the disease, most individuals with asthma can be physically active and live healthy lives. Even though

vigorous exercise may cause symptoms for students with asthma, today's treatments can successfully control asthma symptoms so that students can participate fully in physical activities most of the time.



Asthma varies from person to person, from student to student and often from season to season. This is why physical education teachers and coaches need to understand asthma and the individual needs of their students. At times, programs for students with asthma may need temporary modification, such as varying the type, length, and/or frequency of activity.

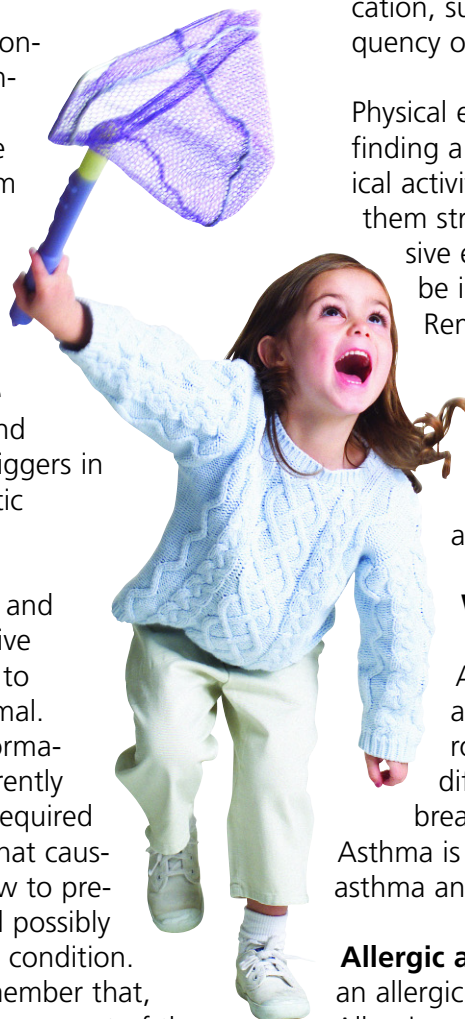
Physical educators can help students with asthma by finding a way to encourage them to participate in physical activity that will improve their health and make them stronger, while keeping a watchful but unobtrusive eye. At all times, students with asthma should be included in activities as much as possible.

Remaining behind in the gym or library or frequently sitting on the bench can set the stage for teasing, loss of self-esteem, unnecessary restriction of activity and low levels of physical fitness. The goal is to not allow the asthma to disable them from being active, healthy and happy kids.

What is Asthma?

Asthma is a chronic lung condition in which the airways in the lungs become blocked or narrowed due to inflammation causing breathing difficulty, coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath or rapid breathing and chest tightness. Asthma is commonly divided into two types: allergic asthma and non-allergic asthma.

Allergic asthma, with asthma symptoms triggered by an allergic reaction, is the most common type of asthma. Allergic asthma is characterized by airway obstruction and inflammation that is at least partially reversible with medication and is always associated with allergy. Allergic asthma is triggered by inhaling allergens such as dust



mites, pet dander, pollens, mold, etc. Through a complex reaction, these allergens cause the passages in the airways of the lungs to become inflamed and swollen. This results in coughing, wheezing and other asthma symptoms.

Non-Allergic asthma has symptoms that are not associated with an allergic reaction. Non-allergic asthma is triggered by other factors such as anxiety, stress, exercise, cold air, dry air, hyperventilation, smoke, viruses, or other irritants. In non-allergic asthma, the immune system is not involved in the reaction, as it is with allergic reaction.

What Triggers Asthma?

Asthma attacks or episodes occur because inflamed airways that are a symptom of asthma overreact to stimuli like allergens, irritants in the air, physical activity and upper respiratory infections. Asthmatics' inflamed airways make them super-sensitive to triggers or things that would not normally bother other people. When someone with asthma is exposed to these stimuli, or triggers, the airways which are already inflamed become even more swollen and block the flow of air to the lungs causing an asthma attack or episode. Asthma episodes can be mild, moderate, severe and even life-threatening. What triggers an asthma attack is different for each person depending upon if they have allergic or non-allergic asthma.

Some of the most common triggers include:

- **Allergens** -- substances that cause allergies such as dust mites, pollens from trees and plants, freshly cut grass, molds, pet dander, and even cockroach droppings. Allergens may be things that you inhale, such as pollen or dust, or things that you eat, such as shellfish or nuts.
- **Irritants** -- in the air, including chalk dust, chemical lawn treatments and smoke from cigarettes, wood fires or charcoal grills. Also, strong fumes or odors like household sprays, paint, gasoline, perfumes, and scented soaps. These particles present in the air can aggravate inflamed, sensitive airways.
- **Smoking** is such a significant irritant that it has earned its own place in the list of asthma triggers. Harmful in many ways to our health, smoking is a risk factor for asthma in children, and a common trigger of asthma symp-

toms for all ages. It may seem obvious that people with asthma should not smoke, but they should also avoid the smoke from others' cigarettes known as secondhand smoke. Studies have shown a clear link between secondhand smoke and asthma, especially in young people and may cause up to 26,000 new cases of asthma each year.

- **Respiratory Infections**—colds, flu, sore throats, and sinus infections. These are the number one asthma trigger in children.
- **Expressing strong emotions**—laughing or crying hard. Even if you don't have asthma, when you experience strong emotions, your breathing changes.
- **Changes in weather**—cold air, dry wind, humidity
- **Exercise**—physical activity that makes you breathe harder, especially in cold air. Some students experience asthma symptoms only when they exercise. This is known as exercise-induced asthma. Symptoms of this kind of asthma may not appear until after several minutes of sustained exercise of at least a moderate intensity. The symptoms of exercise-induced asthma usually go away within a few hours. With proper treatment, a child with exercise-induced asthma does not need to limit his or her overall physical activity.

Managing Asthma Triggers

Getting control of asthma means recognizing asthma triggers (the factors that make asthma worse or cause an asthma episode), avoiding or controlling these triggers, following an asthma management plan as prescribed by a physician, and having convenient access to prescribed asthma medications. For physical educators, it also means modifying physical activities to match the students' current asthma status. By taking a few easy preventive measures, people with asthma can dodge many asthma triggers.

Actions to Consider at Home:

- Dust often at home using a damp cloth. Vacuum carpets with machines that have high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters. Use wood, tile or vinyl floor coverings instead of carpeting to reduce dust. Clean moldy surfaces with bleach.
- Control dust mites by washing blankets, sheets and bed-covers once a week in warm water. Cover mattresses, box springs and pillows in allergen-proof covers.
- Keep pets off furniture and carpeting and out of bedroom.
- Don't smoke and avoid secondhand smoke.

Actions to Reduce Triggers for Students in a Physical Education Setting:

- Schedule maintenance or pest control that involves strong irritants and odors for times when students are not in the area and the area can be well-ventilated.
- Adjust schedules for students whose asthma is worsened by high pollen or mold counts or cold air. A midday or indoor physical education class may allow more active participation.

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