Exercise Induced Asthma

Exercise Induced Asthma is also called exercise induced bronchospasm (EIB). It is a type of asthma that causes breathing problems such as coughing, wheezing or chest tightness during or after exercise.

People with this type of asthma have very sensitive air tubes. Fast breathing during exercise causes the airways into the lungs to cool down and dry out. Quick changes in air temperature and moisture cause the air tubes to tighten and get smaller. Small air tubes make breathing harder. Air pollution, pollen, or mold spores breathed into the lungs during exercise can also cause breathing problems.

If you have chronic asthma, allergies, sinus problems or a family history of allergies, you may be at risk for this condition.

Signs

Breathing problems begin after you start exercise or 5 to 20 minutes after stopping exercise. The most common signs are:

- Wheezing
- Coughing
- Tiredness
- Shortness of Breath
- Chest Tightness

Testing

Your doctor will ask about your breathing and do an exam, checking your heart and breathing. These tests may also be used:

- **Exercise challenge test** is done by measuring your breathing while you walk or run on a treadmill, or ride an exercise bicycle.

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- **Eucapnic voluntary hyperventilation test** is done by breathing fast into a tube to measure the amount of air going in and out of the lungs.

**Treatment**

EIB can be treated with medicine before exercise. Medicine in an inhaler is breathed into the lungs 15 minutes before exercise. The medicine quickly opens the air tubes and keeps them open for 4 to 6 hours. If the inhaler medicine before exercise does not work or if breathing problems get worse, talk to your doctor. You may need a change in medicine.

**Controlling Your Signs**

This type of asthma should not prevent you from activities you enjoy or getting exercise. Some exercises and sports with rest periods cause less breathing problems, such as baseball, volleyball, tennis, downhill skiing, and golf, may be easier to do. Here are other ways to reduce your signs:

- Warm up by stretching or walking slowly for 5 to 10 minutes before moderate exercise.
- Allow for a 5 minute rest period when signs begin.
- Exercise indoors when the air outside is cool and dry or if there is air pollution or ozone alerts, or if the pollen counts are high
- Breathe through your nose during light exercise. The nose warms and adds moisture to air more than mouth breathing.
- Wear a scarf or mask over your nose and mouth to warm the air before it goes into the lungs.
- Talk to your doctor about ways to control signs of allergy such as stuffy nose, sneezing, or itchy eyes. Allergies can make signs worse.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.