



Exercising with asthma

Every move counts

Move more and reduce your sedentary time each day by incorporating different types of movement. It is never too late to start, some is always better than none!

How to get started

Regular exercise increases the body's ability to take up oxygen, improving the ventilation and health of the lungs. Asthma is not a reason to avoid exercise as it can significantly improve your overall health in combination with the correct treatment, appropriately prescribed medicines and adherence to certain safety precautions. Regular exercise reduces stress, improves your immune function and sleep quality, and helps you maintain a healthy body weight.

If you suffer from 'exercise-induced asthma' (EIA), use your preventer inhaler as prescribed and reliever inhaler 10–15 minutes before warm up. You may need to use your reliever inhaler again after prolonged exercise or when you finish. EIA is easily managed and should be addressed in your asthma action plan, as developed with your doctor or healthcare professional.

Plan your exercise to suit your pattern of potential asthma attacks. Mid to late morning exercise may be better for you. Weather, environment and symptoms are all things that can affect your asthma control, so be prepared and sensible enough to adjust your exercise plan when necessary.

Fun activities that involve short bursts of exercise such as volleyball and martial arts are generally well tolerated by people with asthma.

Ensure that your asthma is well controlled by taking the medicines as directed by your doctor or pharmacist.

Warm up and cool down

Always start your exercise session with a 10–15-minute warm up to loosen up the muscles and raise the heart rate safely. Warm-up exercises include dynamic stretches, range-of-motion activities and low intensity movements. This can be done standing up, walking around, marching on the spot or seated.

Always end your exercise session with a 10–15-minute cool-down to ensure your heart rate and breathing rate return to normal safely. Cool down exercises include slowly decreasing the intensity of your activity and simple stretches.

Be active

Some is good, more is better

How much:	Aim for at least 150 – 300 minutes a week of moderate intensity or at least 75–150 minutes a week of vigorous intensity physical activity. Start moving more each day increasing to regular movement every day and add sessions as your strength and stamina improve. If your asthma is triggered, stop exercising: follow your asthma action plan and contact your doctor or healthcare provider as you may need more intensive medical management.
------------------	--

How hard:	Any movement helps. Aim for moderate to vigorous intensity—aim to get slightly breathless but not enough to trigger an attack. Take frequent breaks, if necessary. Short bursts of activity are recommended. You can get significant health benefits from low intensity exercise and activities; however, try to progress to high intensity training for the greatest benefit while tailoring your plan to the severity of your asthma.
How long:	Aim to spread out your session throughout the week. If your fitness level is low, start with 5–10-minute sessions and add 10-minute intervals until you can comfortably exercise for longer. Shorter exercise sessions may be better than longer ones, and increase the duration before you increase the intensity.
What type:	All physical activity counts. Try activities within your abilities: walking, cycling, jogging, dancing, swimming, water aerobics, hiking—choose something you enjoy! Recreational team sports such as soccer, tennis, or volleyball are great social activities too! Household activities such as cleaning, gardening, vacuuming or walking your dog are great activities for your health. Swimming is an excellent choice as the humid air helps with breathing. Activities that involve long periods of exertion such as distance running and cold weather sports such as cross-country skiing may be less tolerated. Find activities that suit you.

What will it do for me?

Regular exercise reduces heart disease, stroke, obesity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension and helps boost your immune system.

Build strength

How much:	At least twice a week.
How hard:	Start with light muscle strengthening exercises and progress to moderate or greater intensities over time.
How long:	Choose 8–10 exercises targeting the upper and lower body and repeat each exercise 10–15 times. Try 1–3 sets of each exercise.
What type:	A variety of strength exercises using free weights, resistance machines or household items such as a can of beans or a weighted water bottle as a weight.

What will it do for me?

Strength exercises keep muscles healthy and strong. It also improves your confidence, overall strength, stamina, prevents falls and helps with balance and coordination.



Exercising with asthma

Improve balance

How much:	At least three days a week.
How hard:	Try 2–3 balance exercises and repeat each exercise 10-15 times.
How long:	Hold each balance for 10-30 seconds. Do 3-4 sets.
What type:	Try yoga, Tai Chi or simple balance exercises for the home environment. Exercise safely when doing balance exercises. Balance exercise can be done standing up, using a chair, against a wall or sitting down.

What will it do for me?

Practicing balance exercises helps to train your body to react more quickly to impending balance loss and can help reduce the risk of falls, fractures and injuries.

Sedentary living

Reduce the amount of time being sedentary. Move more and break up sedentary time. Sedentary behavior is defined as time spent sitting or lying with low energy expenditure, while awake in the context of occupational, educational, home and community settings, and travel. Higher amounts of sedentary behavior can increase the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

Replace sedentary behavior with more physical activity of any intensity (including light intensity). It is possible to avoid sedentary behaviour and be physically active while sitting or lying, through, for example, upper body led activities, inclusive and/or wheelchair-specific sport and activities. Try seated stretches for those with limited mobility; using active forms of transport; standing while working (within your abilities and environment), and other accessible active options to replace sedentary time.

Helpful Resources

Asthma Canada can provide you with expert support and advice about asthma related inquiries. Call 1-866-787-4050 or email info@asthma.ca to be connected.

Asthma Canada lists tips on exercising while living with asthma and provides a template for you to create an action plan with your healthcare provider. https://asthma.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/BREATHE-EASY-A-Guide-for-Being-Active-and-Healthy-with-Asthma_optimized_EN.pdf

Your exercise, your way!

Choose activities that are easy to start with, and that you enjoy. Always exercise within your abilities. If mobility is difficult, adapted cycling, swimming and chair-based exercises may be better alternatives. Exercising with asthma keeps your heart and muscles fit and healthy and may also assist in the management of your asthma symptoms. Keep in mind that it may take up to six weeks to get used to an exercise plan and determine what works best with managing your asthma symptoms. Try fun, short-burst exercises! Choosing the exercise best suited and most enjoyable is the best way of maintaining an exercise plan. Exercise with friends and family or join a group class. Try exercising both indoors and outdoors and see which you prefer. Most importantly: **some physical activity is better than none.**

Exercise safety

Follow your asthma action plan as agreed upon with your doctor or healthcare provider.

Always be mindful of how you are breathing, before, during and after exercise. Avoid your triggers and assess the air quality prior to exercising outdoors.

If your asthma is triggered, stop exercising: follow your asthma action plan and contact your doctor or healthcare provider as you may need intensive medical management.

Do not exercise if you feel unwell or your asthma is not controlled.

Avoid exercising in extremes of temperature and limit it on high pollen count days.

Always ensure you have your asthma medicines (reliever inhaler) with you.

Start with shorter sessions (e.g. 10–15 minutes) and slowly build up to the recommended level.

Aim to get slightly out of breath, but exercise sensibly and stop the activity if you feel unwell.

Always wear comfortable clothing and shoes that give good support. Take frequent breaks if necessary, and drink water before, during and after exercise.

Choose environments that you can access freely and safely. Please ask your healthcare provider or local leisure organizations for advice on the best option for you.



Scan for more physical activity resources!

