



Asthma

& Physical Activity

Asthma should not prevent you from being regularly active. Many people with asthma can still perform at the highest level of sport and athletics. If asthma is triggered with exercise, use prescribed inhalers before and during your session. **Conditioning your body through regular activity makes asthma attacks less likely over time.¹ You will also feel less short of breath as your physical capacity improves with regular activity.** Exercise becomes easier and so more enjoyable to do. Don't let asthma prevent you from being healthy: keep active.

Regular physical activity also gives you more energy, builds confidence and can help you to sleep more soundly at night. Combine your activity time with family and friends or use it as an opportunity to reflect on things and listen to your favourite music.



Physical Activity Recommendations for currently inactive adults with Asthma

Aim to do the following three types of activity:

-  **Aerobic activity** at relative moderate intensity for at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week – one way to approach this is to do 30 minutes on at least five days each week.
-  **Muscle strengthening activity** on two or more days a week which work all major muscles groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulder and arms)
-  **Flexibility exercises** on a daily basis



Plan your lifestyle change

Keep it simple: Don't make drastic commitments. Choose activities that are easy, simple and enjoyable to maintain.

Set a goal and monitor: Set weekly targets that are achievable and keep a record of what you do. If you fail, create barriers to the things that stop you from reaching them.

Go Public: Discuss your goals and activities with others to keep you motivated for longer.

See 'Getting started' at www.prescription4exercise.com for useful tips on planning your next move.



Do not worry if you struggle to meet the recommendations, because by trying to become more active, you are still gaining some health benefits



Aerobic activity

Aerobic activity, also known as endurance activity, is when large muscle movements, maintained over a period of time, make the heart and lungs work harder.

Activity Type? Any type that you can maintain comfortably is ideal. Choose exercises that you enjoy, such as walking, cycling or group fitness classes. Team sports, like football and rugby, which are played with brief bursts and short breaks in between are can be ideal. Swimming is also a good activity because the warm, humid swimming pool helps prevent symptoms (however some people find that very cold or heavily chlorinated water triggers their asthma).

How long (duration)? – You can split your total activity amount into minimum bouts of 10 minutes if needed. If you have been inactive for a long time, start with short

daily amounts and increase this as your body allows and you feel more confident. Remember not to sit for hours. A regular break from sitting every hour is healthy.

How hard (intensity)? - Progress slowly to a relatively moderate-intensity activity. When doing moderate intensity activity you will feel warm, mildly out of breath and mildly sweaty. The ‘talk test’ is a simple way to measure moderate intensity. This means that you can still talk, but not sing, during the activity.

How often (frequency)? – If you aim to do 30 minutes per day then do this at least 5 times per week so that you reach the 150 minutes total per week. Distribute the sessions over the week and aim to have no more than 2 consecutive days without physical activity. When you start any new activities make sure you give your body enough time to recover and adapt between sessions.

Muscle Strengthening and Flexibility



Activities that promote strengthening and flexibility are vital for a complete physical activity programme. Being stronger and more flexible makes it easier to carry out aerobic activities, such as brisk walking or swimming. It also makes people feel and look better. Some people, with asthma, find yoga stretches that are performed in harmony with breathing very beneficial. Visit the ‘Strength and flexibility’ section at www.prescription4exercise.com for some simple video exercises that you can do at home. weight choice is the one which is hard to complete by the end of the set. A repetition is one complete movement of an activity, like doing a sit up or bicep curl.

*See prescription4exercise.com for video examples of **strengthening and flexibility** exercises you can do at home



Choosing the right activity

Where to start? Try to choose activities that are local, enjoyable and practical.
Visit the website for plenty of ideas and choices of things to do new you.

Safety considerations

- If you have led a very sedentary lifestyle, begin by doing low intensity exercise of short duration, e.g. 10 minutes. Increase your level of activity gradually to avoid injury
- Stop exercising if you feel dizzy, sick, unwell or very tired.
- See a doctor if you are having chest pain, black outs or breathlessness on mild exertion.
- Always have your reliever inhaler with you when you exercise. If exercise triggers your asthma, use your reliever inhaler before you warm up.
- Do a gentle warm up.
- Try to avoid things that trigger your asthma. Cold, dry air can be a trigger in many people so you may need to take regular breaks. Increased levels of pollen in the summer months may be another trigger.
- Avoid physical activity if your asthma is severe or uncontrolled by your medicines at rest.

If you have any other long term health conditions ask your healthcare professional and/or visit [www.prescription4exercise](http://www.prescription4exercise.com) for additional useful safety considerations

References

1. Morton AR et al. Australian Association for Exercise and Sports Science position statement on exercise and asthma. *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport* 2011; 14: 312-316

Further reading

- Start Active, Stay Active - a report on physical activity for health from the four home countries * Chief Medical Officers, UK Department of Health, July 2011. www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_128209
- ACSM's Guidelines for Exercise Testing and Prescription, American College of Sports Medicine, 2009
- Swedish National Institute of Public Health. Physical Activity in the Prevention and Treatment of Disease. Professional Associations for Physical Activity, Sweden, 2010. Asthma, 232-241. www.fyss.se

Other useful websites: www.asthma.org.uk

Visit [www.prescription4exercise](http://www.prescription4exercise.com) to learn more about physical activity and how it can prevent and treat many long term conditions.

This leaflet has been provided for information only. ALWAYS check with your doctor if you have any concerns about your condition or treatment. Prescription4exercise.com is not responsible or liable, directly or indirectly, for ANY form of damages whatsoever resulting from the use (or misuse) of information contained in or implied by this information.