

Breathe Easy

Helping Runners Deal with Asthma

As the mild spring weather moves into the area, many Essex County runners leave their treadmills behind and head into the streets and parks. For allergy and asthma sufferers however, running or any aerobic exercise may not be as easy as it is for the rest of us. If you are asthmatic, you are not alone. Worldwide rates of asthma are rising at an astonishing rate of 50% every decade.

What is Asthma?

Asthma is defined as a chronic inflammatory disease of the airways. When an asthmatic is in the presence of a trigger, the lining of the airways become inflamed and or the muscles surrounding the airways tighten causing it to narrow and breathing to become difficult. You are at a higher risk of developing this disease if you have a family history of asthma, have a high exposure to tobacco smoke, chemical irritants, workplace toxins, poor air quality or have allergies. Symptoms include: shortness of breath, tightness in the chest, fatigue, coughing and wheezing.

If you are asthmatic, know your triggers. Common triggers for asthma attacks include: colds or respiratory infections, hot humid air, cold dry air, and exposure to chemicals, moulds, smog and allergens.

How does exercise trigger asthma symptoms?

Normally, people breathe through their nose. Your nose acts as an air filter. It controls the temperature and humidity of the air before it reaches your lungs.

When you exercise, your body requires more air and breathing speeds up. Air that comes through your mouth has not been filtered, warmed, or humidified by your nose. This means the air that gets to your airways is cooler and drier than usual.

If you have asthma, your extra-sensitive airways don't like cool dry air. Your airways react: the muscles around the airways twitch and squeeze tighter. Tighter airways mean there is less space for the air to pass through. This makes you wheeze, cough, and feel short of breath.

When doing any aerobic activity, the volume of air you breathe increases drastically. This also increases your exposure to air pollution, air borne pollen and other environmental allergens.

What should you do if you think you have Asthma

It is important to see your doctor for proper diagnosis and treatment plan. Many natural therapies are also available and can drastically reduce or even eliminate the symptoms caused by asthma.

Run on a park trail or quiet country road well away from vehicle traffic and exhaust fumes.

Check out the local air quality forecast at www.airqualityontario.com. You can even register to receive “email alerts” on smog days from the Ontario Ministry of Environment. If ozone levels are high, head to an air-conditioned gym.

Avoid running in the afternoon during the summer months when ground level ozone reaches its peak.

Proper warm up and cool down are essential to allow your body to adjust to the change.

Exercise is beneficial for both physical health and emotional well being. It strengthens your breathing muscles, boosts your immune system and helps keep a healthy body weight. All of these benefits can improve your asthma in the long run. With proper treatment, most people with asthma should be able to exercise to their full ability. Summer is on its way; breathe easy and enjoy!

