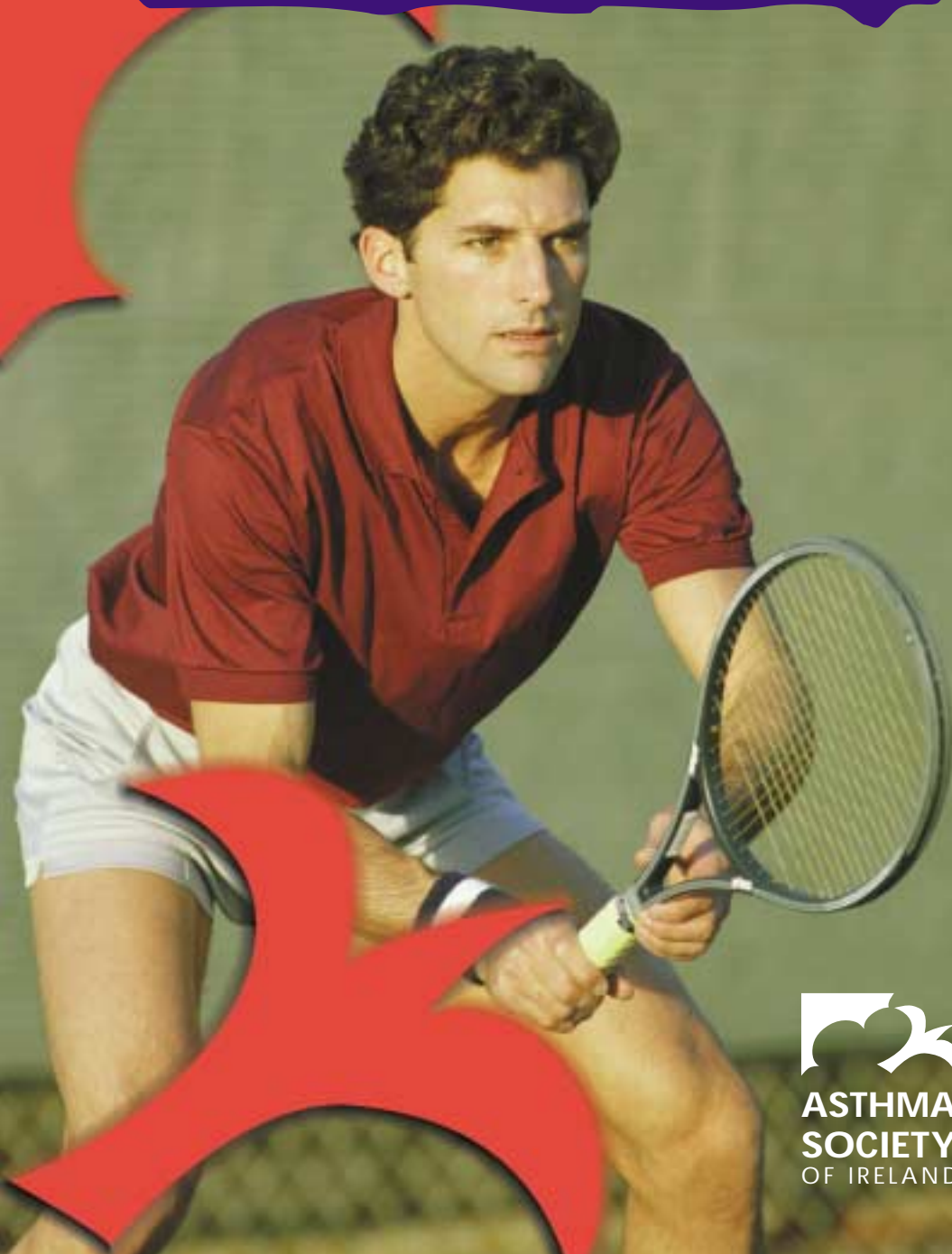


# ASTHMA - *And Exercise*



**ASTHMA  
SOCIETY  
OF IRELAND**

## EXERCISE AND ASTHMA.

" He runs about all right for five minutes or so, but when he stops his chest immediately tightens up so that within a short while he can hardly breathe at all."

A mother describes how her child's asthma is brought on (triggered) by exercise.

### **Why exercise may start an asthma attack.**

People with asthma have airways that are almost always red and sore (inflamed). Because they are inflamed the airways are quick to respond to anything that irritates (triggers) them. Although they vary from person to person, triggers such as flu, cigarette smoke and cold air can make the airways narrower by tightening the surrounding muscles. Exercise is also a common trigger and when the symptoms of asthma (coughing, wheezing, chest tightness or breathlessness) follow exercise this is either called exercise-induced-asthma (EIA).

### *People with asthma often wrongly give up sports.*

Exercise-induced-asthma does not mean the end of exercising. It can often be effectively treated so that most people with asthma can choose to take up almost any sort of exercise; many people with asthma have become Olympic medalists.

### *Today most people can take up any sport successfully.*

Exercise is good for everyone, so this booklet aims to explain exercise-induced-asthma and how it is best prevented or treated.

### **How to recognise Exercise-induced-Asthma**

It may be difficult to tell the difference between normal breathlessness after exertion and asthma caused by exercise. We all get 'puffed' by vigorous exercise. However, if someone is wheezing, coughing or their chest tightens they should ask their doctor if it is caused by asthma. The symptoms may be most obvious within a minute of stopping exercise, get worse over a few minutes and last

for up to half an hour. Both adult and child asthma can be triggered by exercise sometimes even when it is otherwise well controlled. Some people's symptoms after exercise are the only sign of asthma since they do not cough or wheeze at any other time.

*Symptoms are most obvious within a minute after exercise.*

There are times when exercise-induced asthma is more likely to develop because the airways are more irritable, such as after a cold or during the pollen season. At these times even short, mild activities may trigger an attack. On cold, dry days the chances of wheezing with exercise also go up.

*The causes of exercise-induced asthma.*

One important cause seems to be the temperature and the moisture content of the air. Indoor swimming, for instance, does not appear to cause asthma as often as running and other forms of outdoor exercise.

The indoor pools are warm and moist. In contrast, on a frosty winter day the air outside is cold and dry. Therefore, breathing large amounts of cool or dry air can trigger exercise-induced asthma whereas warm, moist air is less likely to cause problems.

Why spotting exercise -induced wheezing is important.

1. It may be the first clue to a diagnosis of asthma
2. Asthma medicines can then help the person to exercise more freely
3. Wheezing in adults may suggest poor asthma control. In this situation the person may need additional medication

**How doctors spot exercise induced asthma.**

Often the knowledge that symptoms appear after exercise is all that a doctor needs to diagnose exercise-induced asthma. He or she may confirm it by seeing if a peak flow measurement of the lungs (breathing test) drops after six minutes of exercise. If it does the diagnosis is probably correct. The doctor may then suggest a couple

of puffs of a reliever inhaler and check the peak flow reading again after a couple of minutes.

## Conquering exercise-induced asthma.

The best approach is to prevent the symptoms by taking medicine before exercising: only cut back on exercise or the type of exercise if absolutely necessary.

## Preventing the symptoms.

### *Warm-up:*

- ❖ Everyone should warm up. A warm up 15-30 minutes before an exercise session is important for everybody, but particularly for asthmatics.
- ❖ A gradual increase in work rate during the warm-up.
- ❖ Stretching and short runs of 10-20 seconds with 20-30 second recoveries are recommended.
- ❖ Use skills rather than running.
- ❖ Taking medication a few minutes before exercising can reduce symptoms. The doctor may advise two puffs from a reliever inhaler before exercising. (Normally the reliever inhaler is used only when asthma symptoms appear.)

### *Fitness Levels:*

- ❖ In some cases improvements in fitness levels, especially aerobic fitness can reduce the severity of EIA. many people with asthma report that their asthma was least troublesome when they were physically fit.

### *Safety of medicines in sport.*

The inhaled steroids used to treat asthma are called corticosteroids. They are not the same as anabolic steroids that some athletes use to improve their performance. The sporting regulatory agencies allow most inhaled asthma medicines to be taken.

## What to do if the medicines are not helping.

If the medicines do not help sufficiently, it is worth remembering the following:

- ❖ Wheezing is usually worse on cold, dry days
- ❖ Long spells of exercise are more likely to induce asthma than short bursts
- ❖ Exercise with arms or legs alone is less likely to trigger an attack than exercise using both.

So cross-country running on a cold winter's day might not be a good idea but sprinting and jumping in the summer may be fine. Common sense decisions, such as playing a less active position in team games, can make all the difference between taking part and not playing at all.

*Common sense decisions help you to exercise.*

11% of U.S. Olympic team who competed in the 1984 Olympics exhibited symptoms of asthma (Voy, 1984).

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For further information on asthma visit our Website at:  
**[www.asthmasociety.ie](http://www.asthmasociety.ie)**

Or phone our Asthma Line at 1850 44 54 64 for 24 hour pre – recorded information.

Or phone our Asthma Liveline to speak to an Asthma Nurse Specialist on 01 8788122. Monday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings: 9.30 am to 1.00 pm. ( Times may vary – please contact our office – *see contact details below* – if you experience any difficulty.)

***The Asthma Society is primarily an information service which aims to enhance and augment the information provided by your GP, asthma nurse and chemist.***



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