

# Exercise-Induced Asthma

## What is exercise-induced asthma?

Asthma is a long-lasting (chronic) lung disease. It causes wheezing, coughing, shortness of breath, and chest tightness. Exercise-induced asthma is a form of asthma that causes problems during or after physical activity.

## What is the cause?

Asthma symptoms are caused by two different problems in the airways.

- One problem is that the muscles in the airways tighten up, which causes the feeling of chest tightness and wheezing.
- The other problem is swelling, irritation and too much mucus in the airways.

If you have asthma, symptoms often start after you are exposed to a trigger.

Asthma triggers can include:

- Exercise (called exercise-induced asthma)
- Allergies, such as dust, pollen, mold, or animal fur
- Something that irritates your lungs, such as cold air, smoke, or strong smells like paint or perfume
- Medicines like aspirin or NSAIDs
- An infection such as a cold, the flu, or a sinus infection
- Strong emotions or stress
- Indigestion, also called gastroesophageal reflux disease, or GERD. If you often have problems with acid indigestion, you may have more asthma symptoms, especially at night.

In exercise-induced asthma, this can occur:

- During or after physical activity and when breathing is hard, heavy, or fast
- When the air is cold
- When the humidity is very low or high
- When there is a lot of air pollution
- When there are a lot of allergens in the air

For many people, winter sports such as cross-country skiing or bicycling in the cold air may cause symptoms.

## What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of exercise-induced asthma include:

- Wheezing
- Coughing
- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness

- Fatigue

## **How is it diagnosed?**

Your healthcare provider will ask about breathing problems during or after exercise. He or she may ask you to run on a treadmill or to exercise outside the office. When you return, your provider will check to see if you are wheezing after the exercise.

You may do special breathing tests before and after exercise. These tests measure how fast you can exhale air in one breath.

## **How is it treated?**

Exercise-induced asthma can be successfully treated with medicine. Two kinds of asthma medicines may be used.

- Long-term control medicines, also called controller medicines. By taking this medicine regularly every day, it helps to control your symptoms. You will take these medicines every day, even if you are not having symptoms. They do not provide quick relief of wheezing in acute asthma attacks.
- Quick-relief medicines, also called reliever, or rescue medicines. These medicines are used as needed to treat asthma attacks. They are not used on a regular, daily basis to prevent asthma symptoms. A quick relief inhaler medicine works fast to relax the muscles of the airways. This kind of medicine is usually given 15 to 30 minutes before exercise. It can prevent symptoms in people with exercise-induced asthma.

## **How can I take care of myself?**

Know what triggers your asthma. Some people have most symptoms when they are active in cold, dry air. During the winter, you may need to exercise indoors, or wear a mask when you exercise outside. Wearing a mask or scarf warms the air before you inhale it. You may also need to be aware of triggers such as air pollution, dust, or pollen.

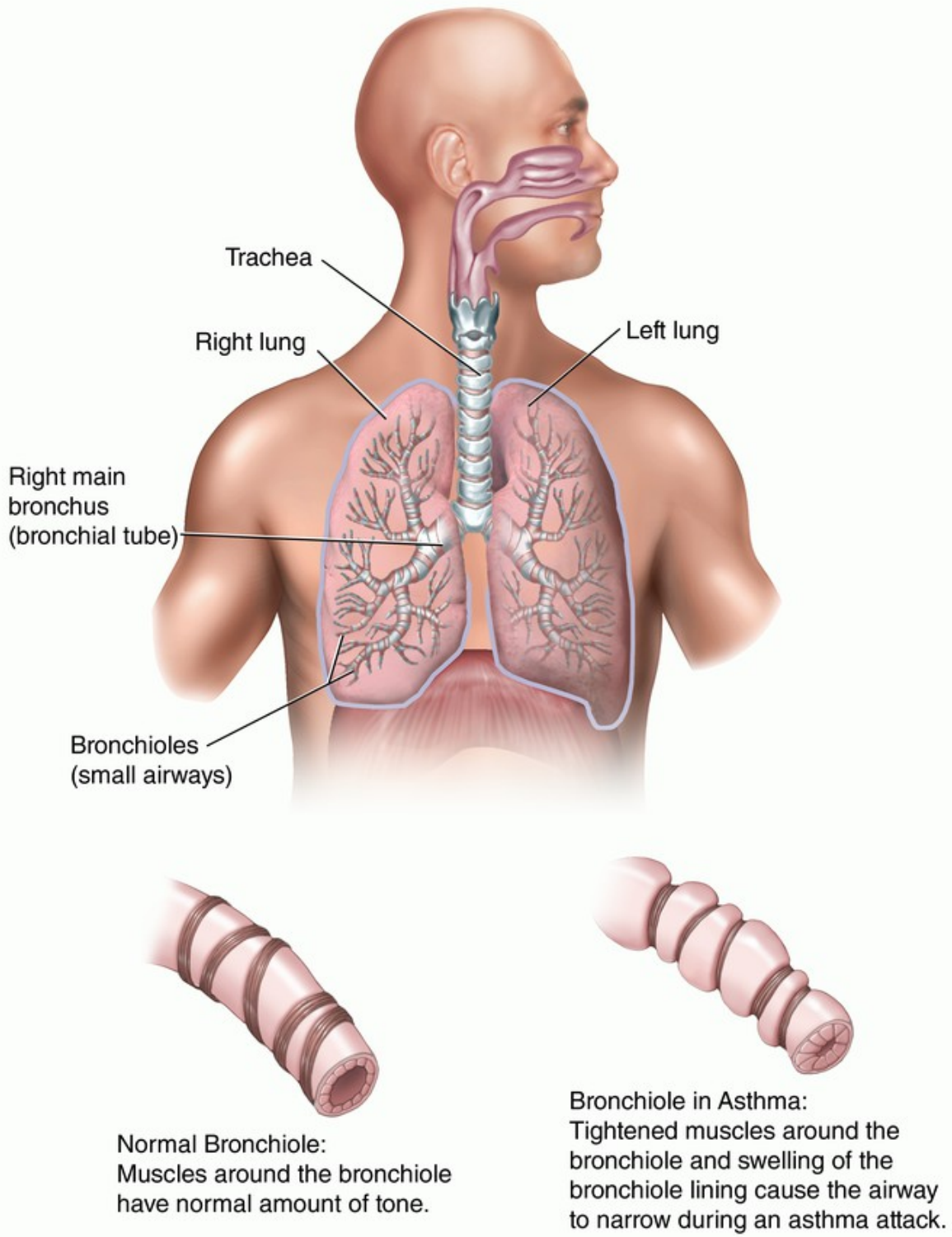
Doing warm-up exercises before a workout may help prevent an asthma attack.

Many people, including successful athletes, have exercise-induced asthma. You can stay healthy and fit with proper education and use of medicine.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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# Asthma



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