

# Running Into Breathing Problems . . . When You Exercise?

Running into breathing problems when you exercise? If your chest feels tight, you have trouble catching your breath or you cough during or after exercise, you might have exercise-induced bronchoconstriction or exercise-induced bronchospasm. That's EIB for short, and it simply means breathing problems brought on by exercise. Most people with asthma have EIB. But, it's also possible to have EIB and not have asthma.

If you think you might have EIB, with asthma or not, there are two important things for you to know:

- An allergist can diagnose and treat your EIB
- Under your allergist's care, you can and should keep exercising

## What happens if I have EIB?

When you exercise hard and do things such as running, skiing, biking or an aerobics class, you breathe more rapidly. This fast breathing can make the airways inside your lungs dry and irritated. As a result, the airways actually get smaller, and it's hard to get air in and out of your lungs. This is more likely to happen when you exercise in cold, dry air, or when there is a sudden change in temperature or humidity.

## What are the symptoms of EIB?

- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing or noisy breathing
- Coughing
- Trouble getting a breath
- Chest tightness
- Unusual fatigue while exercising

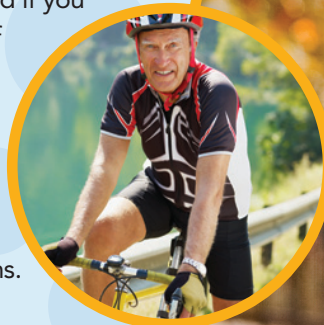
These symptoms can seem very mild, but they can be potentially deadly for people who have EIB with asthma.

Even if your symptoms are mild, you need to get treatment to prevent damage to your lungs. And if you have asthma, symptoms of EIB are a sign that your condition is not under control. Sometimes people — especially children — don't exercise because of these symptoms. If your child doesn't like to exercise and you don't know why, you should talk to your child to see if breathing problems or EIB could be the reason.

## How do I find out if I have EIB?

Diagnosing EIB can be hard because coughing and shortness of breath have many causes. To be sure, see an allergist, a doctor with special training and expertise in treating allergies, asthma, EIB and other breathing problems.

The allergist will ask questions about your health and your symptoms, and do a physical exam. You probably will have a test called spirometry that measures how much air you can breathe out after taking a deep breath. The allergist may also order a chest X-ray, blood tests or allergy tests. Sometimes the allergist may do tests that measure how well your lungs are working before and after you exercise.



## How is EIB treated?

If you have EIB, your treatment will depend on how serious your symptoms are and whether you have EIB with or without asthma. Your allergist may prescribe medicines that you take with an inhaler. There are two main types of these medicines:

- **Quick relief.** Quick-relief inhalers are used to stop symptoms and should be carried at all times if you have asthma or EIB. To prevent EIB symptoms, you may take these medicines 15 minutes to 20 minutes before exercise to open the lungs' airways. Surveys show that many asthma patients do not use their quick-relief inhaler before exercise even though they have symptoms. Your allergist will talk to you about the importance of taking these medicines and choosing the right one for you. For example, some inhalers can be stored in any position, like on their side, while others cannot and you want to make sure you have an inhaler that works with your active lifestyle.

- **Long-term control.** There are several medicines that people with asthma take regularly — sometimes twice a day — to help prevent symptoms and attacks. These work by treating the inflammation — reducing swelling — and build-up of mucus in the lungs.

## How can I prevent EIB symptoms?

In addition to medicine, your allergist will give you simple tips to prevent symptoms. These include:

- Warm up at least 10 minutes before exercise
- Breathe through the nose, and not the mouth
- Use a face mask or scarf in cold weather
- Cool down after exercise
- Skip or limit exercise when the weather is really cold or dry, or, if you have allergies, when pollen counts are high
- Exercise less, or less vigorously, if you have a virus, such as a cold

## Are there exercises or sports I should avoid if I have EIB?

With proper treatment, EIB shouldn't stop anyone from exercising or doing sports. Some activities are more likely

to trigger EIB. Usually these are sports that require a high level of energy or are done in cold, dry weather such as:

- running
- basketball
- soccer
- cross-country skiing
- biking
- ice hockey

## Sports less likely to cause problems:

- walking
- football
- hiking
- gymnastics
- golf
- shorter track & field events
- baseball
- swimming

No matter what sport you do, your allergist can work with you to make sure you keep your condition under control.

## Who has EIB?

Overall about 10 percent of the people in the U.S. have EIB. More than 24 million people have asthma, and 80 percent to 90 percent of them have EIB. While four out of five asthma patients have exercise-related symptoms, less than one-quarter have been diagnosed with EIB. More than one-third of the people with asthma avoid activities because of their symptoms.

EIB without asthma is common in elite athletes — those who exercise strenuously over long periods of time. It is especially common in athletes who take part in cold weather sports such as cross country skiing or hockey. If this is you, your allergist may suggest limiting your training to 20 hours per week. High doses of one type of long-term control medicine also may help.

## Take control and learn more

Whether you're training for the Olympics or simply trying to stay in shape, you can stay active and control your EIB if you work with an allergist.

Find an allergist, find relief. For more information and to track your symptoms with My EIB Journal, visit

[AllergyandAsthmaRelief.org](http://AllergyandAsthmaRelief.org).



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