Living with Exercise-Induced Bronchoconstriction

Up to 20% of people without asthma experience EIB symptoms.

1. Introduction

Exercise-induced bronchoconstriction (EIB), previously known as exercise-induced asthma, occurs when the airways constrict and become inflamed during exercise, making it more difficult to breathe. People with this condition may experience asthma symptoms during or after physical activity. Symptoms can worsen when the air is cold and dry, or when pollen counts are high. However, most people with EIB can continue to remain active if they take steps to prevent symptoms.

2. Causes

Cold air was once thought to be the cause of EIB, but recent studies have found that it is more likely caused by dry air. Quickly breathing in cold, dry air during exercise dehydrates the airways, causing them to constrict and reduce airflow. While intense aerobic activity is the primary trigger for EIB, some other triggers may include:

+ High pollen counts
+ Exposure to smoke, chemicals, or other strong fumes
+ A recent upper respiratory infection or asthma episode

3. Symptoms

Symptoms of EIB typically start within 10 to 15 minutes after high-intensity aerobic activity lasting 5 to 8 minutes and resolve within 30 minutes to 1.5 hours after stopping exercise. Common symptoms of EIB are:

+ Shortness of breath or wheezing
+ Decreased endurance
+ Tightness or pain in the chest
+ Cough
+ Upset stomach
+ Sore throat

Some people will experience a second wave of symptoms 4 to 12 hours after exercise. These “late-phase” symptoms are often less severe and can take up to 24 hours to go away.

4. Treatment

Treatment for EIB focuses on preventing and relieving symptoms. In addition to preventative steps like warming up before physical activity, providers may prescribe medications that you breathe in using an inhaler or nebulizer to help open the airways during symptoms.

Did you know?

As many as 90% of people with asthma also have EIB, but not everyone with EIB has asthma.

For more information on EIB and supportive resources, please visit www.mayoclinic.org.

References:

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