Exercise Induced Asthma (EIA)

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Are you out of shape? Do you cough when you run? Do you get short winded when you exercise?

Before you blame it on being out of shape, let me ask you this: "Have you heard about Exercise Induced Asthma (EIA)?" EIA means that you get difficulty breathing and you start coughing during or shortly after finishing exercise. The cough may last from 1/2 to 1 hour after the exercise.

EIA is the most ignored diagnosis in medicine. While 4% of the population has asthma, 12% of the population has EIA. Yet very seldom do I get a referral from a primary care physician for EIA. The right environment to trigger EIA is to exercise in cold weather. People who have EIA shy away from exercise. The kids who have EIA try to avoid physical education from the fear of being ridiculed by their peers for being last finishing running the track. The majority of them become out of shape and overweight.

It is very important to diagnose EIA early so that these patients, especially kids, can participate in sports without having a problem.

To diagnose EIA, a pulmonary function test is done in which the patient blows hard into the pulmonary machine. Then he/she will run for 5 minutes, relax for 10 minutes, and then blow into the machine again. If there is a drop in the lung capacity by more than 15% after exercise, then the person has Exercise Induced Asthma (EIA).

The physical examination is normal except that if you listen to the chest shortly after finishing the run wheezing may be heard.

For treatment, the EIA patient is given 2 puffs from an Albuterol inhaler 10-15 minutes before exercise to prevent difficulty of breathing from occurring most of the time. I advise my patients...
who have EIA to warm-up before running fast and to cool-down after finishing the run. Certain patients require more than one medication to control the EIA from occurring.

The good news is that 16% of the American Olympic team athletes have asthma or EIA, and yet 57% of them have won medals compared to 43% who do not have Asthma or EIA. Way to go asthma patients! Good luck to every asthmatic and athlete.

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