

PRESS RELEASE

Exercise: a new tool in asthma management

Istanbul/Zurich, 12 June 2011 - The severity and likelihood of asthma attacks, and in particular attacks brought on by exercise, can be reduced by regular, moderate aerobic activity such as running or recreational cycling, new research shows. This new, preliminary finding from Professor Stefano Del Giacco of the University of Cagliari, Italy, could help the 300 million asthma sufferers worldwide to manage their condition more effectively and reduce the need for drugs.

Exercise has a reputation for making asthma worse, but this study shows that as long as the levels are moderate, exercise is beneficial. Professor Del Giacco studied a professional football team in the Italian "Serie A" (Premier League), as an example of training on a regular basis. They tested all the team for allergies at three different times during the whole championship season, analysing their blood for signs of an immune reaction. The results showed that the team had a lower than average allergic response, indicating that the regular exercise undertaken by the team reduced their chance of allergy.

Despite the apparent unpredictability of an attack, in most cases, careful and correct management can allow most asthmatics to lead a normal life and avoid attacks altogether. "There are a lot of examples of Olympic gold medallists who are asthmatics" said Professor Del Giacco today at the Congress of the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology in Istanbul. Therefore, the importance of new approaches that help asthma management should not be underestimated.

How can mild exercise reduce the risk of an asthma attack? The answer seems to lie in the effect of regular, moderate physical activity on the immune system, whereby levels certain immune molecules that are responsible for bronchial inflammation, and consequently for an asthma attack, are reduced, and those that protect against this are raised. Furthermore, being overweight can increase the chances of an asthma attack and so mild exercise has the added advantage of helping to prevent obesity.

The rapid breathing that happens when we exercise can trigger an asthma attack. For non-athletes who suffer from exercise-induced asthma, the type of recreational sport chosen is also important for avoiding attacks. "You don't need intense activity to get exercise-induced asthma, it is just a matter of time. It takes around 5-8 minutes of exercise to bring on an attack, and that is why you have to choose the right sport," explained Professor Del Giacco.

Recreational sport for asthmatics can be divided into three categories – high, medium and low risk. Low risk are sports like short and middle distance track and field events and, of these, perhaps unexpectedly, the 100m sprint is one of the best. It has a burst of activity of less than five minutes, so is unlikely to trigger an attack. Medium risk are team sports such as football and basketball with longer but intermittent periods of

activity, and high risk are endurance sports like competitive cycling and marathon running.

The combination of careful asthma management using drugs and mild exercise, and choosing the right sport can be particularly important for asthmatic children. Activities such as running in a playground can trigger asthma, and these children can be prevented from playing with friends for fear of an attack. But, as with adults, attacks can be avoided as long as their asthma is well managed. "This is a very important message, I think, because it relates to psychological issues that are part of growing up, socialisation and self-esteem" said Professor Del Giacco.

"Regular, moderate exercise can improve your asthma and also your immune system – this is nowadays very well proven. The general message is that mild exercise should be recommended to asthmatics as part of their symptom management program," he said.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Professor Stefano Del Giacco, University of Cagliari, Italy delgiac@tiscali.it. Prof Del Giacco is a member of the EAACI Task Force "Exercise and Lifestyle Interventions in Allergy and Asthma", which looks at the effect of exercise, nutrition and obesity on allergy and asthma

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About EAACI :

EAACI - The European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology is a non-profit organisation active in the field of allergic and immunologic diseases such as asthma, rhinitis, eczema, occupational allergy, food and drug allergy and anaphylaxis. EAACI was founded in 1956 in Florence and has become the largest medical association in Europe in the field of allergy and clinical immunology. It includes 6'500 members from 107 countries, as well as 41 National Allergy Societies.

Throughout 2011, EAACI will develop different activities to celebrate the 100th anniversary of immunotherapy in Allergy, which will aim at increasing the knowledge in this field among healthcare professionals, increase awareness in the general population, and finally, promote the availability of immunotherapy for allergic patients.



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