Staying active is a big part of a healthy lifestyle. But it’s not always easy to exercise if doing so brings on an asthma attack.

Exercise-induced asthma, or exercise-induced bronchoconstriction (EIB), can present symptoms like coughing, wheezing, and tightness in the chest within five to 20 minutes after starting to exercise.

The good news is that you can take steps to help lower your risk of having an exercise-induced asthma attack.

In fact, physical activity can help you build up a tolerance for exercise, which can help lower your risk of having asthma problems when you’re active.

Before you begin any type of exercise program, though, it’s important that you talk with your doctor first.

Once you’ve received the OK from your doctor, try these tips for safely exercising with asthma:

- Take your asthma medications before you start exercising. Also, allow yourself plenty of time to warm up before beginning any activity.
- Try doing low-intensity activities that are less likely than more intense ones to bring on an asthma attack. Swimming or walking are good choices. If you do want to try more vigorous activities—such as running—gradually increase your intensity over time.
- Rest when you need to.
- Avoid exercising when asthma triggers are present, such as cold air or pollution.
- Take time to cool down after you’re done exercising. A warm bath or shower may also help.

Sources: American Council on Exercise; Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America
Medicare national coverage determinations: Stay up-to-date

From time to time, Medicare makes decisions called Medicare National Coverage Determinations (NCDs). These decisions may add new covered services or change the coverage of items and services.

Rocky Mountain Health Plans (RMHP) wants to ensure our Members have the most current information regarding NCDs. Visit rmhp.org/members/how-to-use/medicare-plans and scroll down the page to the Medicare National Coverage Determinations section.

RMHP is a Medicare-approved Cost Plan. Enrollment in RMHP depends on contract renewal.

1. **It promotes heart health.** Walking has tremendous benefits for the heart: It drops blood pressure, regulates blood sugar, and lowers cholesterol, which are all risk factors of heart disease.

2. **It improves brain function.** Ever notice how walking clears the mind? It’s more than just a figure of speech. Walking helps improve concentration, focus, and attention span. Exercise increases the level of BDNF (brain-derived neurotrophic factor). BDNF has been shown to preserve the health of existing neurons and create new ones.

3. **It eases depression.** The best way to turn a frown upside down is to hit the streets with our feet. Exercise in general, and walking in particular, releases endorphins, or “feel-good” chemicals, in the brain.

4. **It improves bone health.** One of the best ways to improve bone health is to do weight-bearing exercises such as walking. Weight-bearing exercise is any exercise that requires the body to work against gravity.

5. **It burns calories.** On average, we burn about 50 calories for every 10 minutes of brisk walking (depending on your weight).

6. **It helps you breathe easier.** When we exercise, our bodies need more oxygen. This means our lungs have to work harder to deepen and quicken the breath. With regular walking, we increase our lung capacity, and that makes for easier breathing.

7. **It increases mindfulness.** Walking helps clear the mind and increase awareness. When we step outside, we activate all of our senses. We feel the sun and breeze on our faces. We notice scents. Rather than letting the world pass us by, we can take time on a walk to be present and notice our environment. This practice will enrich all of our moments, even after the walk is over.

8. **It reduces stress.** As mentioned above, walking increases endorphin levels in the brain and gives us the ability to take fuller breaths.
Fresh produce
Handle it safely

A crisp apple or a fresh sliced tomato can supply a multitude of nutrients to boost your health—not to mention spicing up your meal. But fresh produce may also deliver unwanted germs. Germs can contaminate produce anywhere from the farm to your table. Bacteria are the most common culprits, and according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), they may live in the soil or water where the plant grows. Contamination can also occur where the produce is stored or even when you prepare it. Cut the risks with these safety measures from the FDA:

Be a choosy shopper. Pass over any bruised or damaged produce. Foods that are cut, such as a half watermelon or bagged salad greens, should be refrigerated or surrounded by ice.

Keep a safe distance. Bag produce separately from raw poultry or meats and keep separate in your kitchen as well. Raw meat juices can contaminate other foods.

Cool it. Store perishable fresh produce—such as strawberries, lettuce, mushrooms, and herbs—in your refrigerator at 40 degrees or lower. The same goes for any cut produce.

Keep it clean. Wash your hands, then cut away any damaged areas on the produce. Throw away any items that seem rotten. Then wash the food under running water, even if you will peel it before eating. Scrub firm produce, such as melons or cucumbers, with a brush. There’s no need to use soap, but drying with a clean towel can help.

Sanitize your area. Wash dishes, cutting boards, utensils, and countertops with hot, soapy water—especially between preparing raw meat, poultry, or fish and preparing produce that won’t be cooked.

Time it right. Wash produce just before eating, cutting or cooking it.

Eat locally
Buying at a local farmers market can mean fresher produce and a chance to ask the seller about how it was grown, reports the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Germs are everywhere, though, even on organic foods, so you should still take the same precautions to avoid foodborne illness.

These two benefits also help us to rid the mind and body of stress. Exercise of any kind drops our level of cortisol, also known as the stress hormone.

9. It improves gait and balance. We master what we practice. If we practice walking, we strengthen our legs and feet. Strong legs and feet make up the physical foundation of improved gait and balance. The better our gait and balance, the less likely we are to fall.

10. It reduces pain. Many of our physical aches and pains come from underuse, not overuse. When muscles, ligament, tendons, and fascia aren’t used, they get tight. This causes pain, particularly in the lower back and joints. Walking is a gentle way to get moving and keep moving so our bodies stay limber, flexible, and pain-free.

RMHP in the community
RMHP will launch the Summer Kids Program (SKP) for a second consecutive summer to promote the health and well-being of children in need in the Grand Valley.

The recipient of this year’s sponsorship is Ariel Clinical Services, a nonprofit Child Placement Agency and Adult Service Agency founded in 1994 in Grand Junction. Ariel provides a range of services for children, families, and adults, and serves hundreds in foster care statewide. RMHP is proud to support our community and such an outstanding organization.
E ach year, Coloradans rely on prescription medications to help with illness, procedure recovery, and pain. Unfortunately, individuals who no longer need their medications, or who did not have a prescription in the first place, are abusing prescription drugs. Recent research shows that the problem is growing, and it’s possible that someone you know is affected by prescription drug abuse.

The Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Program of Peer Assistance Services, funded by the Colorado Office of Behavioral Health, compiled the following 2013 statistics to provide a clear picture of the problem facing the state:

- In 2013, 1.6 people died every day from unintentional drug poisoning.
- In 2013, 35 percent of the drug poisoning deaths in Colorado were due to opioid analgesics, or painkillers. According to the 2013 National Survey on Drug Use & Health, 5.08 percent of Coloradans reported using pain relievers in a nonmedical capacity in the past year.
- In 2013, more people in Colorado died from poisoning due to opioid analgesics (295) than from drunk-driving related fatalities (134).
- The 2013 Healthy Kids Colorado Survey revealed that one in seven Colorado high school students (13.6 percent) had taken a prescription medication without a doctor’s prescription one or more times during their life.

Know the numbers behind prescription drug abuse

Formulary updates
Stay up-to-date on formulary changes or additions, including new drugs and generics. Visit rmhp.org/members/rx-info and click on “Formulary Updates” under “Learn More About Your Drug Coverage,” or call 800-346-4643 (TTY: 711), and we will mail you a copy of the latest update.

RMHP pharmacists are here to help you with questions about your current medications. Call 800-641-8921 today with any questions, or log in to accessRMHP at rmhp.org to find helpful articles relating to prescription drugs.

Source: Peer Assistance Services, Inc. (peerassistanceservices.org)