

# Asthma and the young athlete

By Steve Olson

ATC, CSCS

**E**xercise-induced asthma (EIA) affects about 40-90 percent of young people with asthma, and occurs when an asthma attack is triggered by exercise or physical activities. Symptoms of coughing, wheezing, chest pain, and difficulty breathing usually begin shortly after starting the activity and worsen over the next five-10 minutes.

EIA can be difficult to diagnose in young athletes if exercise is the only trigger and they do not otherwise have symptoms of asthma, since they usually have normal exams and normal peak flows when examined by their physician. Many times, these children are labeled as out of shape or lacking endurance by coaches.

It is important that if a young athlete demonstrates symptoms of EIA that they have an in-depth evaluation by a physician.

With proper treatment, young athletes' activities should not be limited by EIA. According to a recent study, at least one in six athletes representing the United States in the 1996 Olympic Games had a history of



## ASK THE DOCTOR

By Dr. Jeff S. Pierce



asthma. Nearly 30 percent of the 1996 U.S. Olympians who had asthma or took asthma medications won team or individual medals in their Olympic competition.

That group did as well as athletes without asthma, 28.7 percent of which earned individual or team medals.

Treatment for athletes with EIA may include a very gradual increase of exercise intensity before moving into strenuous sports activity. A physician may also prescribe a bronchodilator (short or long acting), an anti-inflammatory medication, or an inhaled steroid. It is extremely important that

use of these medications is as prescribed by the physician.

Keep in mind that there may be times, especially after an asthma attack, that participation in athletics may have to be limited. Return to activity should be gradual after an asthma exacerbation and rest should be allowed as needed.

If you have further questions or are in need of recommendations regarding exercise-induced asthma, please contact a staff member at the Michigan Sports & Spine Center. 248-680-9000