

Using your asthma inhalers during swimming

Is it my asthma or is it the exertion making me breathless?

Exercise-induced wheeze (i.e. asthma) usually lasts for 15 minutes after exercising stops, compared to being breathless from exercise which stops more quickly.

If you think it is your asthma, consider using your blue reliever inhaler 15 minutes before getting into the water.

The blue reliever inhaler (usually salbutamol) should last for 2–4 hours. If you are wheezy it is very important to use it, but if you are not wheezy and you use too much salbutamol you can get side effects including feeling shaky, fast heart beat and palpitations, headache, cramps...not great for swimming!

So if you feel you need to use again it before 2 hours read on.....

Why am I getting wheezy during swimming?

If your blue inhaler isn't lasting through training, try to work out why.

1. Is it really wheeze? Or is it the exercise making you feel breathless?
2. Are you using your inhaler device properly?
3. Is hayfever making your asthma worse? Antihistamine tablets or other medicines may help this.
4. Is your day to day asthma controlled adequately? Or do you need more preventer treatment (usually a brown inhaler, sometimes green or purple inhalers, or montelukast tablets)?

Symptoms which suggest your asthma needs more treatment include:

- Asthma symptoms more than twice per week when not exercising
- Waking during the night because of asthma symptoms
- Recent asthma attacks
- Using your blue inhaler more than twice per week (not just before exercise)
- Peak flow measurements varying day to day.

If you think your asthma is poorly controlled, please see or telephone your asthma nurse or GP at your surgery to get more advice.

Please do ask me too, although it may be difficult to give detailed advice without knowing your full medical background. This is just a brief outline, and may not address any individual symptoms so please get advice if you need it. Please feed back any comments.....

Dr Lisa Brewster, General Practitioner. May 2010