



YOUR HEALTH

THE NET WAY TO A SOUND MIND AND BODY

Learn to Breathe Easy

With proper management of their condition, asthma sufferers can lead normal, active lives. By Mark Witten

What do speed skater Susan Auch, runner Charmaine Crooks and cyclist Curt Harnett have in common? Each of these Canadian athletes is an Olympic medalist who suffers from asthma. Despite having a chronic lung disease, they performed at the highest world level, demonstrating that people with asthma can live full, active lives.

“People should be able to do normal physical activities such as cross-country skiing, hockey and tennis despite having asthma,” says Dr. Kenneth Chapman, director of the Asthma and Airway Centre at the Toronto Western Hospital, University Health Network. But many patients can’t exercise safely, suffer attacks and have a reduced quality of life because they don’t receive effective treatment. A study by Chapman found that though 91 percent of asthmatic Canadians thought their disease was well controlled, “in nearly 60 percent of cases it wasn’t.”

Chapman’s findings take on a special urgency because asthma is a potentially fatal illness that’s becoming much more common. “Somewhere between two and three million Canadians suffer from the disease,” says Chapman, noting that the rise in asthma is partially a result of increased exposure to indoor and outdoor pollutants. Asthma in Canada (<http://www.asthmaincanada.com>) reports that the prevalence of asthma among adult Canadians has nearly tripled over the past two decades. Asthma is the leading cause of hospital admissions and school absence among children, and of emergency room visits. Even so, experts say that 80 percent of asthma deaths are preventable.

Major progress has been made in developing better medications and inhalation devices that can dramatically reduce symptoms, prevent serious attacks and improve quality of life. The University Health Network’s Asthma Centre (http://www.uhn.ca/patients_and_visitors/asthma) offers detailed



guidelines to help sufferers manage the condition.

Two main categories of medicines are used to treat asthma: long-term controllers and short-term rescue medications. Drop by the Asthma Society of Canada (<http://www.asthma.ca>) to learn how anti-inflammatory medications reduce symptoms and prevent attacks, but may have certain side effects. The Canadian Lung Association’s Asthma Resource Guide (<http://www.lung.ca/asthma/index2/html>) shows how bronchodilators provide quick relief of symptoms by relaxing muscles of airways.

Discuss with your doctor ways to reduce exposure to asthma triggers. Visit [asthma.org.uk](http://www.asthma.org.uk) (<http://www.asthma.org.uk>) for information on common triggers, such as cigarette smoke, dust mites, pets and pollen. MayoClinic.com (<http://www.mayoclinic.com>) reports that occupational asthma may account for up to 15 percent of asthma cases, with more than 240 substances, such as hydrochloric acid and grain dust, known to be workplace triggers.

People with asthma can enjoy better health and experience fewer symptoms by taking an active role in managing the condition. “Go to your doctor armed with questions and suggestions,” says Chapman. “Learn as much as you can about the disease, so you can be an effective partner in your own care.” @

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EXERCISE SAFELY

Since vigorous exercise can bring on asthma attacks, get cautionary advice at The Lung Net (<http://lungnet.org.au>). Find out why scuba diving is more likely to bring on an asthma attack than swimming in a heated pool. Visit the Canadian Lung Association (<http://www.lung.ca>) to learn how proper exercise warm-ups and cool-downs can help you to breathe easy.