

RESPIRATORY CONDITIONS

Asthma is the most common breathing problem that occurs with exercise.

Athletes with mild acute asthma symptoms may experience coughing, chest tightness, shortness of breath, and wheezing.

Athletes with more severe limitations from asthma may experience fast breathing, difficulty breathing or speaking, retractions, and cyanosis (turning blue). These are referred to as signs of respiratory distress.

ACTION TO TAKE FOR RESPIRATORY CONDITION

- Adults should administer a quick-relief bronchodilator medication such as albuterol.
- Most inhalers should be administered with a spacer device, unless otherwise specified by the inhaler instructions, to optimize medication delivery to the lungs.
- If there is no reduction in symptoms despite appropriate use of a quick-relief medication, or if signs of respiratory distress are observed, adults should refer the individual for immediate medical attention or call 911.

EILO or VCD

Another common, although lesser known, cause of shortness of breath experienced by athletes is exercise-induced laryngeal obstruction (EILO). EILO is a respiratory disease characterized by airway obstruction in the throat. Throat obstruction occurs due to the inappropriate, partial closure of the vocal cords and nearby structures during high-intensity exercise. EILO was previously known as vocal cord dysfunction (VCD). EILO most commonly occurs in motivated, competitive, high-achieving athletes in their teens or 20s.

Common symptoms of EILO include severe shortness of breath that is “scary” to the athlete and obvious/concerning to observers. The athlete with EILO may feel like he/she is “breathing through a straw” with symptoms of hyperventilation (fast breathing, pallor, dizziness, lightheadedness, nausea, numbness/tingling). Observers may hear stridor (a high-pitched gasping sound when the athlete inhales). Asthma medications do not help EILO.

ACTION TO TAKE FOR EILO OR VCD

- Athletes should perform controlled breathing and relaxation exercises (if known) to abort the symptoms without notable intervention from others.
- Athletes who present with these symptoms but are not receiving treatment specifically for EILO should consider seeking further evaluation.

Respiratory Conditions link: www.recognizetorecover.org/respiratory-conditions