

Breathing Easier

You don't have to skip exercise if you have asthma

By Juan Villa

Visalia Times-Delta, Monday, April 21, 2014

The message is simple: you can control your asthma.

That's once again the theme for World Asthma Day 2014 taking place around the world on May 6, thanks for the Global Initiative for Asthma. WAD 2013 featured 114 asthma-related activities in 44 countries.

The message is also for athletes; athletes with asthma like Charaighn Sesock of Visalia, who has learned to control her asthma while exercising in the San Joaquin Valley.

"You really have to get to know your body and know what works for you and what doesn't. I do keep tabs on air quality too," she said. "You need to know how much you can stretch it out."

Sesock is originally from San Diego and only began having asthma-related symptoms when she began running in the Valley about 10 years ago.

Monday she was running the 2014 Boston Marathon and is just days away from running the 2014 Big Sur International Marathon.

"I've learned to manage mine," she said. "I've noticed because of racing in very different spots that once I get out of the air quality of the Central Valley, my lungs seems to clear up a little bit. I do need that puff in the beginning, but generally I make it to the end and have another inhaler waiting to take a few more puffs."

What she's learned has been helpful with her daughter, who also has asthma.

"I try and teach her the same things," she said. "Like the feeling you have when your start to not be able to breathe, you feel like you're gagging, like you're really hot and your lungs feel like they're compressing and the air isn't coming through. Those are triggers that she needs her inhaler or a breathing treatment."

Training can be especially difficult for athletes during the hot summers in the San Joaquin Valley.

Dr. Rabinder Sidhu, an allergist at Allergy and Asthma Associates in Visalia, said it's important to keep tabs on air quality when preparing to work out.

"Air quality is a big issue in the San Joaquin Valley. That's because the particulate matter, the very small particulate matter in the air and the pollution. That doesn't help at all," he said. "In the summer we have very high heat and the sun bakes the air and produces ozone. It's a lung irritant and that's why we have those days where kids can't exercise outside."

Here are a few things Sidhu suggested athletes with asthma should keep in mind.

- Exercise-induced asthma is asthma that is triggered by exercise or physical exertion, but it can be treated. It's a well-known entity that can happen to people who have chronic asthma, but also to some that don't. There is medicine and techniques available that you can employ to cut down the instances of tightness and shortness of breath.
- What happens with exercise-induced asthma is when people start really exerting, they start breathing air through their open mouth and they aren't able to warm and humidify the air as much as they would be able to do it if they breathe in through their nose. If you breathe through your nose when you're resting, you take the outside air, warm it to body temperature and humidify it almost 90 percent by the time it gets to your lungs. If you have relatively cold and dry air going into your lungs, that's what triggers an asthma attack in exercise-induced asthma.
- Use your inhaler prophylactically, about 20 to 30 minutes before exercise.
- Keep the inhaler handy in case you have to use it. Down the road if they still have problems they can use it again, but it's better to pre-treat themselves to prevent an asthma attack from happening.

- The time of day you exercise can matter if the air quality is bad. If there's a lot of ozone in the air we tell people not to go out. It's another trigger of asthma. There's a lot of pollution on bad air quality days.

"A lot of Olympic-level athletes have exercise-induced asthma. So it's not something that holds people back from doing what they need to do," Sidhu said. "As long as they're properly treated and educated about their condition, they should be able to compete at the highest level."

Chad Chrisman, coach and trainer at California Fitness Academy in Visalia, has worked with athletes who have had asthma attacks while training with him.

"I have them sit up against a tree, recline themselves a bit to open their airways a little more," he said. "I also have them practice the diaphragmatic breathing. They take big breaths through their nose and all out of their mouth. It helps calm them down and open up the air flow."

A daily air quality forecast for Tulare County can be found on the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District website every day, with the next day's forecast available after 4:30 p.m. each day.

If you drop off your kids at school every morning, an easy way to find the air quality forecast is by looking at the flags the school is flying. The colorful flags are part of the Air Quality Flag Program. Green is good, yellow is moderate, orange is unhealthy for sensitive groups and red is unhealthy for all groups.

While you're waiting, make sure not to idle though.

"It's very bad for young children, especially children that are walking right through the emissions of the cars. Four minutes of idling actually equals one mile of drive-time pollution," said Destiny Rodriguez, director of outreach and communications for the Central California Asthma Collaborative. "Parents are idling and not knowing they're not contributing to the health of students. As they're walking through the emissions, they're breathing all that in. They're breathing exhaust fumes."

The RAAN Program (real-time air advisory network) provides more current forecasts thanks to the pollution control district's monitoring stations across the valley, it can be found at www.ValleyAir.org.

The three programs (flags, RAAN, idling campaign) are part of the Healthy Air Living Schools program. It's a "comprehensive outreach initiative that aims to improve the health and quality of life of all Valley residents through strategies that clean up our air."

"We believe in the program as a preventative measures program. Especially for students with asthma and repertory problems," said Rodriguez. "It's a great way for schools to get notifications on what they air quality is like outside and they can then make more informed decisions on what type of physical activities the children can do on poor air quality days."

Air quality board considers easing diesel rules

The Associated Press

Merced Sun-Star and Lodi News, Monday, April 21, 2014

LOS ANGELES — California air quality officials are considering giving small trucking operations more time to comply with new rules to clean up diesel emissions.

The proposal would push back deadlines by a few years for small fleets, lightly used trucks and those in rural areas with cleaner air, and offer other adjustments to assist truck owners, the Los Angeles Times reported Sunday (<http://lat.ms/1rfppR1>).

The state Air Resources Board said even with the changes the state could still achieve 93 percent of pollution cuts envisioned through 2023. A vote is planned for Thursday.

The changes under consideration come in response to pressure from small trucking firms and owner-operators who have pleaded for more time to comply with rules requiring them to install costly new diesel particulate filters or upgrade to cleaner models. The rules took effect this year.

"We're all struggling," Allen Forsyth told the Times. Forsyth operates a three-truck fleet that hauls local freight near Los Angeles International Airport. "I used everything I had to buy a 2012 truck. But I'm absolutely broke now."

Environmentalists and other clean-air advocates have urged the board to limit amendments to the regulation and preserve what they call the single biggest step California has taken to reduce health risks from air pollution.

The proposed changes would slow the pace of cutting soot and smog-forming gases from the nation's most polluted basins in Southern California and the San Joaquin Valley, air quality officials acknowledge. But they say diesel emissions would fall to the same level as the existing regulation by 2020, when nearly every truck in the state will be required to have a filter to remove soot from its exhaust.

Diesel soot is by far the largest contributor to cancer risk of any air pollution source in California and was declared a toxic air contaminant by the state in 1998.