

# Asthma and exercise: why patients can and should stay active

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More than 300 million people live with asthma globally, and 6 million do not adequately control their symptoms. In a new European survey of nearly 1,000 severe asthma patients, 88% reported the condition impacted their daily lives, and almost the same amount (84%) said asthma limited their physical activity.<sup>1</sup>

We all know that keeping active is good for our health and benefits our overall well-being,<sup>2</sup> so it's concerning that so many asthma patients – especially severe asthma patients – feel that exercising or even just moving about a bit more is out of reach.

## Asthma management: patient perceptions vs. reality

This new research also revealed a significant discrepancy between “perceived” versus “real life” asthma control. Specifically, nearly half (46%) of the patients surveyed described their asthma as being “controlled,” which is in marked contrast to the 6% of patients who are actually deemed as “controlled” according to the Global Initiative for Asthma’s clinical guidelines. This discrepancy may explain why so many people don’t visit their doctor to discuss other treatment options that could help them achieve more and increase their physical activity.

Severe asthma patient Nichola Duane has been living with the condition for the last 19 years. “My asthma symptoms vary from day to day, depending on what sort of day I’m having,” she says. “If I have a heavy cold, then my asthma symptoms are very loud – wheezing, rasping, struggling for breath, very noisy, you can hear me from quite far away. Other days it’s more subtle because I’m struggling to breathe. It feels like trying to blow up a balloon that doesn’t quite blow up, or sucking through a straw that’s got a hole in it. You don’t seem to be getting anywhere.”<sup>3</sup>

Prior to her asthma diagnosis, Duane was captain of a sports team. But because her asthma symptoms have worsened, she has found it difficult to keep active and has stopped participating in group sports.

## Overcoming obstacles to exercise

More needs to be done to help asthma patients overcome barriers to exercise. The first step is to bridge the gap between the perceptions of “good” asthma management versus reality. While asthma can’t be cured, it can be controlled – and with appropriate treatment, a symptom-free life is possible.<sup>4</sup> Asthma awareness is key to ensuring better outcomes and to equipping patients with the guidance and support that they need. Important resources for those who want to get moving include advice on how to start exercising, recommendations about the best exercises to undertake, and tips and tricks to maintain progress.

Duane has this advice for patients: “My advice for somebody who has been newly diagnosed with asthma is to take medication as prescribed and to look at things very positively instead of looking at things you can’t do anymore. Look at things you can do. Sometimes you need to step back and look at things from a different approach, but you can do it and you will get there.”

## New Patient Engagement Program: Billion Breaths

Novartis is committed to focusing greater efforts on empowering and educating people living with asthma. That is why we are launching a new patient engagement asthma campaign, Billion Breaths, which will encourage people with asthma to get active and achieve a life less restricted by the condition.

### Learn More

1. Katsaounou P, Conde L G, Kroegel C et al. The challenges of living with severe asthma in Europe. Abstract #858 presented at EACCI Congress 2017
2. NHS Choices, Benefits of Exercise. Available at: <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/fitness/Pages/whybeactive.aspx> [accessed May 2017]
3. Data on file. UK severe asthma patient testimonial, May 2017
4. NHS Choices, Asthma. Available at: <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/asthma/pages/introduction.aspx> [accessed May 2017]

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### **List of links present in page**

1. <https://prod1.novartis.com/news/asthma-and-exercise-why-patients-can-and-should-stay-active>
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kniyOgnpQr4>
3. <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/fitness/Pages/whybeactive.aspx>
4. <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/asthma/pages/introduction.aspx>