



Shortness of Breath: Why it happens by Frank DiMeo

"I'm okay, just let me catch my breath." How many times have you heard that, or said it yourself? Probably more than you realize.

You could have been experiencing **EIB** or **Exercise-Induced Bronchoconstriction**. In the NSCA Strength & Conditioning Journal (Vol. 29, pages 21-23), John Patzan explains this very well.

I've distilled some of his insights here.

As a person's upper airways become constricted, their lungs are not able to adjust to the increased demands placed upon them.

Hyper ventilation, especially in cooler weather, can cause a drying out of the airway cells. This is more prevalent when a person is breathing mainly through their mouth.

Nasal breathing actually warms and moistens the incoming air; these effects are lessened greatly when breathing through the mouth.

Usually, a person will wheeze or cough when this happens and their athletic performance declines. In some cases, a person may experience cramps, headaches, or dizziness.

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Another cause of reduced breathing capabilities can occur when exercising in a cold temperature, even in Florida in the winter, and then moving suddenly into a warmer area. This can cause engorgement, or swelling of the blood vessels of the airway.

Some activities are more prone to airway constriction, such as long-distance running, basketball, and soccer. While sports like weightlifting, baseball, and swimming are affected less.

A few precautions can be helpful, such as:

- 1) Do a thorough warm-up prior to exercising and do a proper cool-down afterwards.
- 2) Don't exercise in extreme heat or cold.
- 3) Have prescription medications readily available, as needed.

As a person's fitness level increases, the likelihood of airway constriction should be reduced. Good judgement is always in order.

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