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Dear Nola Bolla,

You have exercise-induced asthma. Asthma is swelling and narrowing of the airways. This narrowing makes it harder to breathe, makes your chest feel tight, and makes you wheeze and cough. Asthma is like an allergy: it happens in response to some trigger and then gradually goes away. Then, at another time, it happens again.

Exercise is one of the many things that can trigger asthma. It begins during exercise or a couple minutes after you're done exercising. The airways are reacting to the increased volume of air, trying to warm and humidify it. The result is airway narrowing that continues to worsen for about ten minutes and then goes away over an hour or so.

Smoking is especially risky for people who have asthma. Smoking irritates the airways and causes flare-ups of airway narrowing, inflammation, and excess mucus. The more flare-ups that occur, the harder it is to control the asthma. Also, smoking prevents asthma medicines from doing their job, and it means using inhalers more frequently. Quitting smoking is a good choice.

You are the most important person in managing your asthma. It will be up to you to learn how to control it. The inhaler can be used just before you exercise or if you feel an asthma attack coming on. Try to figure out how different treatments work for you. Notice what things are triggers for you. Triggers might be dust, certain pillows, carpets or furniture. They might be pet dander, pollens, cold air, or secondhand smoke. When you identify a trigger, try to avoid it.

Albuterol is an asthma and COPD medicine in an inhaler (or by taken by nebulizer) that reduces airway inflammation. The prescription calls for two puffs as needed. Albuterol can cause a rapid heart rate, shaking, nervousness, headache, and nausea. Be sure to read the label thoroughly, and use only as directed.

Please note that this letter is only an informational guide and a summary of the things we discussed. It does not take the place of first-hand medical diagnosis and treatment. Thank you for coming in today.

Sincerely,

Dr. Morin