

How Regular Exercise May Improve Asthma Outcomes in Black Women

An ongoing trial seeks to determine whether daily exercise can reduce asthma symptoms and improve lung function in Black females.

January 16, 2024 By Laura Schmidt

Researchers from the University of Chicago Medicine are conducting an ongoing trial investigating whether regular physical activity may help prevent [asthma](#) in Black girls, according to a [UChicago article](#).

Environmental and societal barriers are known to influence the health of Black children and adults. From 2018 to 2020, about 4 million non-Hispanic Black adults and children reported having asthma, according to the [Department of Health and Human Services](#). In 2020, Black children had a death rate 7.6 times higher than that of non-Hispanic white children.

“Exposure to allergens—such as cockroaches, mouse droppings and mold in low-income housing, and urban outdoor pollution—can exacerbate asthma and increase the incidence in children,” said Sharmilee Nyenhuis, MD, an associate professor of pediatrics and medicine at the University of Chicago, who is conducting the ongoing trial.

Although there are plenty of medications available to treat asthma, Nyenhuis believes exercise may be a better option. Her trial is examining the effectiveness of regular physical activity, such as daily walking, as a treatment for women, only 15% of whom get the recommended amount of physical activity, according to UChicago.

“Good data shows that exercise can improve asthma control and lung function and reduce exacerbations of asthma, sometimes equivalent to some medications,” Nyenhuis told UChicago.

Black women and girls experience higher rates of uncontrolled asthma, health care visits and mortality and worse lung function and poorer quality of life compared with white women.

The trial tracks participants’ walking habits and evaluates changes in lung function and asthma control. Study authors will also observe how barriers such as poor air quality or feeling unsafe walking outside may prevent participants from achieving their walking goals.

“We are relying on the collective IQ of this community of women to develop strategies that enable them to continue exercising despite the challenges,” said Nyenhuis.

Nyenhuis aims to expand the current trial to include Black girls with asthma ages 8 to 12 and their mothers to understand the influence mothers can have on their children's health.

"If we can help girls develop a lifelong habit of exercising, they may have better asthma control as adults and realize the other benefits of exercise, such as a reduction in obesity and in metabolic diseases, like diabetes and cardiovascular disease," said Nyenhuis.

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