

# fitness

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## What is exercise-induced asthma?

Exercise-induced asthma (EIA) is an acute narrowing of the airway that, as the name suggests, is initiated by exercise. Classic symptoms include chest tightness, coughing, wheezing, excess production of mucous, sore throat and shortness of breath during or after exercise.

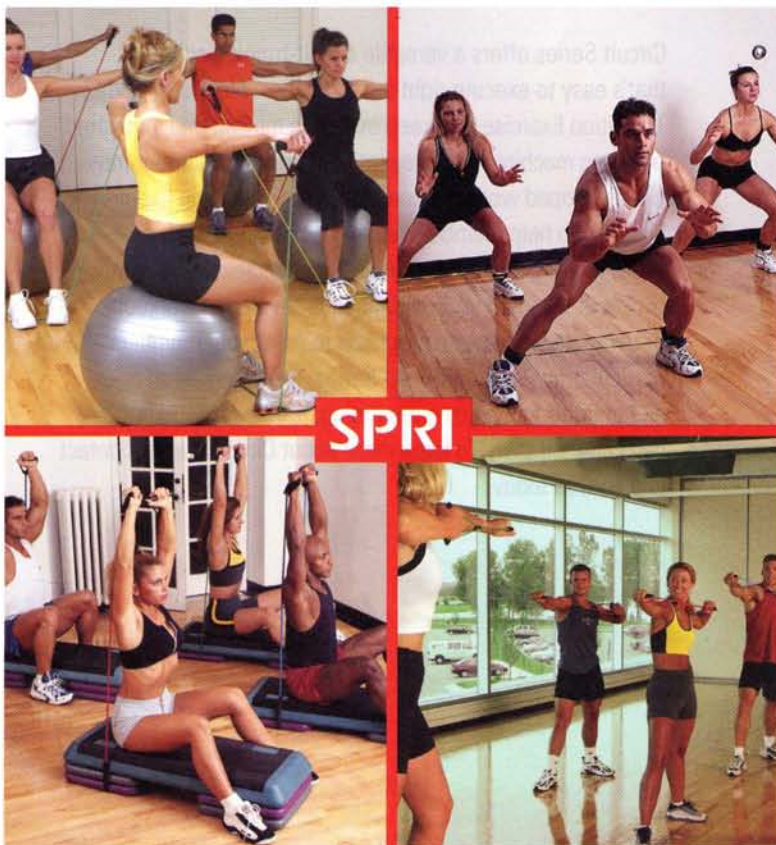
The condition is much more prevalent than you might think. It's estimated that 12 to 15 percent of people in the U.S. have EIA. Moreover, the condition is found in recreational and elite athletes. One study showed that 17 percent of the athletes in the 1998 Winter Olympics had EIA (with cross country skiing as high as 50 percent). An estimated 70 to 90 percent of all individuals with chronic asthma experience EIA.

The symptoms are more likely — and

more severe — during efforts that are intense or prolonged. So, those who suffer from EIA should adjust their levels of intensity and duration accordingly. Cold, dry air causes more symptoms. An effective tactic is for individuals to cover their nose and mouth when exercising outdoors in cold weather. Warm, humidified air lessens the degree of bronchospasm, which suggests that swimming is an excellent activity.

Anyone who suf-

fers from EIA should seek the advice of a physician, who may prescribe medication as a preventive measure. **FM**



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## How does using the arms and legs in combination affect exercise on an elliptical trainer?

Most elliptical machines offer users the option of performing the activity with their legs only or with their arms and legs in combination. Obviously, the latter alternative engages a greater amount of muscle tissue. But does the combined use of the arms and legs really have any notable effect?

In one study, subjects performed two tests on an elliptical machine on separate days: one with their legs and another with their arms and legs. Both tests consisted of six, five-minute stages. Three stages were performed at 110 strides per minute, and three at 134 strides per minute. The stages were performed at three resistance settings: 2, 5 and 8.

Researchers found that, at any given stride rate and resistance, using the arms and legs jointly required a significantly higher oxygen intake, and had a lower rating of perceived exertion at a similar heart rate than using just the legs. Since there is a direct relationship between oxygen intake and caloric expenditure, this also means that more calories are used when the arms and legs are exercised jointly. **FM**

## Can echinacea prevent or treat the common cold?

Despite many years of trying, scientists have been unable to find a way to prevent colds. Indeed, how many times have you heard that we can put a man on the moon, but we can't cure the common cold?

One of the best-selling herbal products in the U.S. is echinacea. Extracts of this plant are used to prevent and treat colds. But, is there any scientific evidence to support this belief?

In one review, researchers identified 58 controlled studies that tested preparations of echinacea in humans. A total of 42 studies were excluded from the review for a variety of reasons, including not randomizing the subjects and using echinacea in combination with another product. The 16 studies that met the inclusion criteria involved 20 experimental groups. The researchers found that taking preparations based on echinacea purpurea after the onset of cold symptoms might be effective in adults in shortening

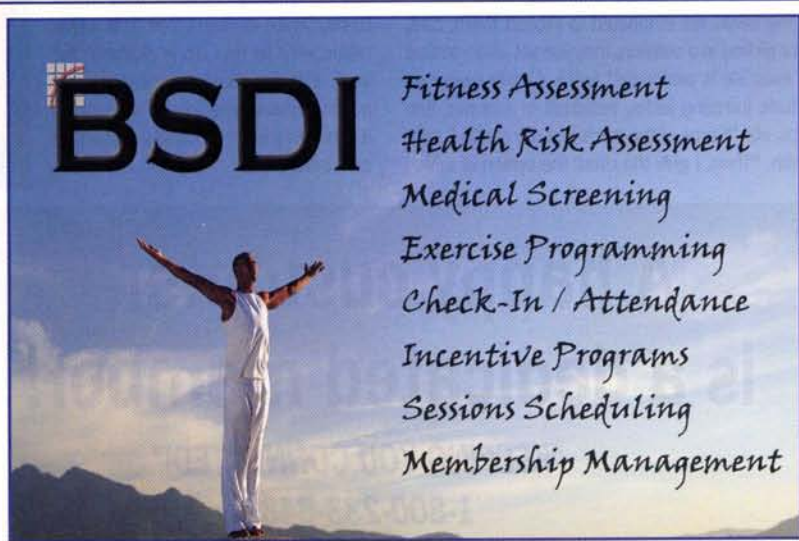
the duration or decreasing the severity of symptoms compared to a placebo. There was no consistent evidence that other preparations of echinacea are effective.

Those who are considering echinacea should note that the products differ significantly for several reasons. This includes the use of dif-

ferent types and parts of the plant, as well as different methods of manufacturing. **FM**

Matt Brzycki is assistant director of campus recreation, fitness at Princeton University, Princeton, N.J. He has more than 24 years of experience at the collegiate level and has authored, co-authored or edited 16 books.

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