

**STEVEN CHUDIK MD**  

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**SHOULDER, KNEE & SPORTS MEDICINE**

## **Exercise-Induced Urticaria**

Urticaria is another name for hives, which most people know as an itchy, allergy-related skin reaction. Exercise-induced urticaria is hives that are brought on by physical activity. These reactions are more common in younger individuals. The hives, which start out as just a bothersome itchy rash, can progress to anaphylaxis. Exercise-induced anaphylaxis produces large hives, swelling of the upper airway, wheezing and bronchospasm, and perhaps a drop in blood pressure, even resulting in death.

### **Frequent Signs and Symptoms**

- Giant hives with or after exercise
- Flushing
- Itch
- Headache
- Nausea
- Swelling of the throat and upper airway
- Difficulty breathing

### **Etiology (Causes)**

Antigens are released that cause antibodies to cross-link on the surface of mast cells. These cells release substances that create hives and cause itching and the other symptoms that accompany this syndrome. The antigen release in this condition can be caused by:

- Exercise
- Gradual heating of the body
- Water loss of the body

### **Risk Factors**

- Weather extremes
- Drug reactions
- Food stimuli
- Increased emotional response
- Menses



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### Prevention

- Some forms of this condition can be prevented by prophylactic antihistamine use.
- Avoid aspirin, anti-inflammatories, and other medications you are sensitive to.
- Avoid shellfish or other foods you are sensitive to.
- Decrease exercise in extreme temperatures, either cold or hot.

### Treatment Considerations

When or if you first develop these symptoms, stop exercising, cool off, and get medical attention for an allergic reaction. If you are known to have exercise-induced urticaria or anaphylaxis, be prepared to treat yourself with injectable epinephrine, which can be prescribed by your physician. These symptoms can become critical, and you should be ready to seek emergency attention. It is advisable to wear a medical alert bracelet in case of collapse. It is a good idea to exercise with a partner. If symptoms develop, cease exercise and find a cool place to rest. As mentioned previously, prophylactic antihistamines may not be beneficial in all cases.



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