

# ASTHMA & ALLERGY BULLETIN

ASTHMA AND ALLERGY FOUNDATION OF AMERICA • NEW ENGLAND CHAPTER  
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## SHARE YOUR STORY

### “Allergy Shots” Helped Make Me a Champion

By Nicole Zais

Swimming is a minimalist sport in terms of equipment, though you do need a couple of things to practice. A suit, a cap, and a pair of goggles are the barest essentials required of a swimmer. Oh yeah, you also need your breath.

I learned to swim at a young age and I loved it, immediately jumping into the competitive aspect of the sport as soon as I could, which would lead me to a successful career at the high school and collegiate level. I



learned about allergies at a young age as well, accepting the sniffs, sneezing and stuffy noses as a part of my life.

In high school, one sport I tried was indoor lacrosse, which involved short intense games taking place in a giant indoor warehouse...full of dust. This was when the asthma first appeared. Sports-induced asthma

is often hard to explain to other athletes who want you to push yourself as hard as they are, so I would quietly take my inhaler and, like my allergies, I learned to live with it.

Crossing over into swimming, the asthma stayed, thriving, I felt, in the confined and chlorinated air of the pool. Nonetheless, I had a successful career in high school and decided to continue on with swimming at the Division III level at college.

Knowing that I would be in one place for the next four years, I began to see an allergist near my college. As I came to know Dr. Accetta and the great group of people working at Allergy & Asthma Care in Taunton, Massachusetts, I also came to understand my asthma and allergies more. I began treatment with “allergy shots” and noticed a steady improvement in my allergies. I was pleased with my progress, but the true test would come during the swimming season in my final year of college.

The Division III NCAA championship swim meet includes athletes from all Div. III schools nationwide who

have made a certain cut time in order to compete at the national level. As I aimed for this goal I trained hard twice a week with a trainer in an enclosed and dusty space, and trained and competed in heavily fumed chlorine and bromine pools. In February of my senior year I became the first female athlete from Wheaton College to earn an “A” cut: a time that was fast enough to guarantee admittance to the meet and to seed me 5th in the nation in the 200-yard breaststroke.



I went on to train for another month and to succeed at the NCAA meet, coming in 6th in the 200-yard breaststroke and 15th in the 100-yard breaststroke, each time improving my times and becoming the first female athlete from Wheaton swimming and diving to achieve individual All-American status.

Yet, all these accolades pale in comparison to what really happened: my true success story. I had achieved all of this in spite of my asthma and because of my allergy shots. I had effectively managed my handicap and navigated around it to the point where I was no longer using my inhaler three or four times a meet: I would only take one puff before warm-up and I could still breathe for the next three hours.

Whenever I go swimming now, I make sure to pack my suit, cap, goggles and inhaler, so I can take a deep breath and dive into the cool, clear water with a smile.

**Please share YOUR story.**  
**How have you handled “real-life” challenges of living with allergies or asthma?**  
**Let us know what happened and how everything worked out.**  
(Send to: [sharons@aafane.org](mailto:sharons@aafane.org) or call 781-444-7778.)