

Asthma

It is World Asthma Day on the 6th of May.

Symptoms - Tight chest, short gasping breaths, wheezing, unproductive cough, postural changes and anxiety.

Eat more fruits, vegetables, salads, especially carrots, mangoes, yellow and red peppers for beta-carotenes and protective antioxidants; grapes, melon, tomatoes, peppers, kiwi fruits for vitamin C; wholegrain cereals and dark leafy greens for B vitamins. Eat plenty of watercress which contains natural chemicals that are specifically lung-protective.

Eat less dairy products, yeast extracts, shellfish, fizzy drinks, nuts and seeds, salt.

Food allergies are common in asthmatic children so avoid any known allergens, most likely to be food additives – colourings, flavourings and preservatives – shellfish, caffeine in colas, tea, coffee, chocolate; some children may even be allergic to naturally occurring substances in fruits and vegetables. Adults are also often allergic to chemicals used in beer and wine making. Alcohol consumption should be limited and confined to naturally produced wines and beers without the chemical additives.

NB: Aspirin and all related drugs like non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (Nurofen etc) may trigger severe asthmatic reactions, so avoid them unless specifically prescribed by a doctor who knows you have asthma.

The increase in asthma over the last 40 years has been dramatic. Although partly this can be attributed to better diagnosis, it is mostly due to the ever increasing pollution of the air we breathe, a significant rise in the consumption of foods laced with chemicals, and domestic changes which encourage the number of dust mites in our homes. Although people of all ages get asthma, most sufferers are children – twice as many boys as girls.

In childhood, asthma is almost always an allergy and there is usually a family history of allergic conditions. Hay fever and eczema may be present in close relatives and may also develop in the asthmatic child.

Some children may show extreme reactions to many of the artificial food colours, flavours, preservatives or other additives, especially monosodium glutamate, tartrazine, sulphur dioxide, nitrites and salt. Fish, dairy foods, yeast, nuts, wheat and fizzy drinks may be an important factor for many children.

Adult-onset asthma is not normally an allergic response to environmental factors, but is triggered by changes in the body – which is why it's called intrinsic asthma. It's sometimes brought on by upper respiratory infections, colds or a bout of bronchitis. Only 1 in 15 intrinsic asthma sufferers is likely to

get hay fever, whereas more than half of allergic, or extrinsic asthma sufferers will have this problem.

Apart from exposure to allergens, including occupationally encountered substances, there are a number of things which may bring on an attack:

- * Emotional stress or anxiety,
- * Sudden vigorous exercise,
- * Chest infections,
- * Sudden changes in breathing patterns, e.g. laughing or coughing,
- * Irritants – smoke, paint, chemicals, gasses,
- * Sudden changes in temperature.

During the winter, there is more chance of catching a cough or cold, both of which can make asthma much worse due to secondary chest infections.

Make sure you boost your natural resistance by healthy eating, take an Ester-C vitamin and zinc supplement and a daily dose of friendly bacteria from low fat natural live yoghurt and **Yakult**.



The natural herbal medicine, Kaloba, is the only registered herbal in the UK containing the plant Pelargonium. It is used to relieve the symptoms of upper respiratory tract infections, including common cold, cough, and sore throat, blocked or runny nose. For anyone with asthma it is important to stop the cold in its tracks and avoid the possibility of a chest infection that will trigger asthma attacks. **Unlike Echinacea, Pelargonium is suitable for people with asthma.**

At the very first hint of a cold, start taking Kaloba and continue for a week after the symptoms have gone. Made by one of the most important Herbal manufacturers in Europe, Schwabe Pharma, you will find all the relevant information at www.kaloba.co.uk

There is now a mass of evidence that air pollution is a key factor in the cause of asthma. Industrial pollution is important, but the most serious villain is the internal combustion engine – petrol or diesel. Emission control and lead free petrol have made some difference but not to the sulphur particulates from dirty diesel engines or the nitrogen dioxide. If you are asthmatic, wear a mask when you go out, or at the very least, cover your mouth and nose with a silk scarf. This will filter out some of the irritant particles, and also warm up the cold winter air before it reaches the sensitive lining of your lungs.

These can also be severely irritated by ozone which is a major pollutant in modern offices. It's generated by many kinds of electronic gadgetry, specially computers, printers, fax machines and photocopiers. Whilst ozone doesn't cause

asthma it irritates and sensitises the linings of the lungs and makes them more easily affected by other irritants.

There are a number of practical changes which it is vital to implement:

- * Turn off central heating in the bedroom. It creates air currents that waft the dust mite droppings, which are microscopic, into the air. They are then inhaled by the sleeping occupant.
- * Ventilate your home or office to prevent the formation of mould and avoid carpets, particularly in kitchens and bathrooms. These trap moisture, encourage moulds which give off highly irritant spores.
- * Most modern offices are drier than the Sahara Desert which also leaves your mucus membranes highly sensitive. Use a desk top humidifier or surround your work station with green plants, the best of which are ivy and spider plants. These both absorb pollutants and give off a little moisture. Have plenty of green plants at home too.
- * Don't smoke if you are asthmatic, or allow smoking anywhere in a house where any member of the family has asthma.
- * Avoid furry or hairy pets and cage birds.
- * Use smooth, wipeable surfaces in the bedroom. Lino or wood flooring, window blinds, a mite-proof or anti-mite impregnated cover on the mattress, duvet and pillows, damp dust all surfaces just before bed, vacuum daily with a suction cleaner with a medical filter and include the mattress.
- * Encourage children to take up any of the wind instruments or singing, this will help establish good breath control.
- * Always take your medication as prescribed by your doctor. Much of it will be for prevention rather than relief of the symptoms and it can be harmful to stop some of the cortisone drugs suddenly.

A diet diary is the next step; write down every single thing that you put into your mouth. Note when you get an attack and see if there is a pattern which is repeated. A recent caller to my radio phone-in programme said that after keeping his diary for three weeks, he noticed that an attack always followed eating a yeast extract. He cut out the offending food and hasn't had one since.

Try to reduce the amount of dairy foods in the diet, avoid sugar and salt, eat more fresh fruit and vegetables and lots of garlic and onions. Cheap red wine and acidic white wines may make things worse, so avoid them. In any case, large quantities of alcohol are not a good idea.

Whilst no serious complementary practitioner would claim to be able to cure asthma, some of their treatments can make a dramatic change to the course of the disease. Osteopathy or chiropractic should be the first choice, as this can be of exceptional value to asthma sufferers. Children with the problem are liable to

develop curvatures of the spine and pigeon chest as a result of years of breathing difficulties. Manipulative treatment can improve the movement of the ribs and spine, as well as helping to minimise posture changes. Good breathing exercises are vital to make maximum use of all the available air in the lungs.

As well as the Ester-C and zinc supplement mentioned above, one of the most valuable natural remedies is a regular dose of essential fatty acids from oily fish flesh, not fish liver oils. These Omega 3 fats have a powerful anti-inflammatory effect and can not only reduce the severity of asthmatic reactions but also help by relieving the symptoms of eczema and hay fever. For vegetarians or anyone with fish allergies you can substitute Barlean's Organic Flax Seed Oil* used in cooking, salad dressings or taken as a supplement. Stirring a couple of dessertspoons of Barlean's Organic Fortiflax* to porridge, yoghurt, fruit juice or sprinkling on sweet or savoury dishes is extremely effective.

Remember the healing power of touch. Gentle massage to the back will be very soothing to anyone in the middle of an asthma episode, particularly children.

Tragically, the death toll from asthma is rising – over 2,000 a year in Britain – and many of the fatalities occur in older asthmatics who did not receive adequate treatment when they were younger, or who had ignored the warning signs of their condition worsening.

Asthma is a serious disease, sometimes fatal. Never underestimate the potential consequences of an asthma attack and if you're in the slightest doubt, call your doctor.

Bed sheets for asthma

Dust mite droppings are a powerful allergen, and often the trigger of asthma attacks – you share your bed with thousands of the mites. Effective netting covers called Astex, are impregnated with a nontoxic naturally derived insecticide which kills the mites.

Simply put the net over the surface of the mattress, leave it for eight weeks, take it off and vacuum the mattress to remove the dead dust mites, put back the netting where it will continue to do its job for around two years. Nets are also available for duvets and for pillows.

For detailed information or leaflets contact: www.AstexAllergyBedding.co.uk