

## **Article 6 - Asthma.**

Most of us take breathing for granted. However for an increasing number of our population, taking a breath of air is at times a major effort or even a desperate struggle due to asthma. Asthma is a condition caused by constriction of the airways in the lungs usually brought about by irritation to the lung tissue which results in the muscle going into spasm, along with an increase of mucous production which then blocks the tiny airways which allow us to exchange oxygen. Asthma is generally an indication that either the immune system has become unbalanced in a particular area, or that the person's body is dehydrated enough to resort to increased histamine production in an effort to constrict the lung tissue so that water loss through breathing is reduced. Both of these things ultimately result in an increase in airway sensitivity and I shall explain this further shortly. When treating asthma it is essential that stomach function, dehydration, nutrient deficiencies, immune system imbalances and allergy are investigated and addressed accordingly. (Please note: Most asthma sufferers use medication which relax the airways and lower the inflammation in the lung tissue. These are a necessary measure while establishing and resolving the root cause of the problem, and should not be removed until improvement warrants it).

**Water:** I know I keep banging on about water, but the reality is that the importance of water can not be under-estimated. I have seen an increase in water intake improve if not resolve the asthma problem for many people, especially where it is exercise-induced. When an individual is dehydrated, the body's production of histamine automatically rises because histamine is one of the key neurotransmitters used in regulating the passage of water through the body. When dehydration is pronounced, increased histamine levels are used to constrict the lung tissue to reduce the amount of water lost through breathing. Being well hydrated will lower the histamine levels in the lungs (and the body in general), therefore reducing the sensitivity of the airways and allowing the lung tissue to relax. It is necessary to take in 8-10 glasses of water throughout the day everyday to achieve this result, and it will take 3-4 weeks for most people to re-hydrate properly before the full effects are felt. The difference water makes to peoples' health is so pronounced I now give a water prescription to most people who come through my door, and there are many people whose need to use their asthma medication has reduced dramatically since increasing their water intake.

**Stomach function:** There is a very strong correlation between poor stomach function and the incidence of asthma. A notable study done by Dr. George W. Bray from the Asthma Clinic at the Hospital for Sick Children in London in 1931 showed that out of 200 asthmatic children, 80% of them had below normal acid production in their stomachs. He also found that by singularly improving their stomach function, within 3 months they were eating better, gaining weight and wheezing less. When he combined this with removing their allergens the results sped up significantly. Many adults with asthma also experience reflux or GORD (gastro-oesophageal reflux disease). As mentioned in a previous article, my experience and that of many natural health practitioners is that these conditions are the result of too little stomach acid, not too much. In healing the stomach and improving its function, reflux and GORD can usually be resolved and the improvement experienced in the asthma for these people is likely due to a removal of the constant irritation of the oesophagus which has a reflex irritation in the lung tissue. Interestingly, there is significant proof that increasing water intake can improve reflux, so perhaps here is another link between stomach function, dehydration and asthma.

**Magnesium:** The airways in the lungs are constructed of smooth muscle tissue. Adequate magnesium and calcium levels are required to ensure that all muscle in the body is able to constrict and relax appropriately, and lung tissue is no different. Supplementation with 300mg to 600mg daily of a balanced magnesium powder can significantly reduce how prone the lung tissue is to going into spasm. To ensure the minerals are absorbed properly take ½ a lemon or 1 tsp of organic apple cider vinegar in ½ a glass of warm water with the supplements, because in most people with asthma there is an issue with low stomach function as mentioned above. (Because citrus is a common allergen, ensure this is not one of yours before you decide which option to use. If you have reflux, please talk to me about resolving this before you use these measures). Magnesium is also known to have an oxygen-sparing effect meaning that the body uses oxygen more efficiently, and because of its natural calcium channel blocker effect, it relaxes blood vessels and improves the strength and efficacy of the heart muscle. Whenever there is impaired breathing more stress is put on the heart and there is an increased demand for oxygen, so this is an important benefit.

**Allergens:** When treating asthma it is vital to identify any allergic triggers and to remove these or reduce the level of exposure to them in order to de-sensitise the immune system. In relation to asthma, the most common food allergens are dairy, wheat, sugar and sulphite preservatives. I know first hand how much of a difference identifying the triggers can make, because removing my key allergens (wheat and sulphites) and rebalancing my immune system has enabled me to remain asthma-free for 6 years, after having been an asthmatic for more than 12 years. Triggers will vary from person to person and the easiest and most accurate way to identify them is to get a hair sample test done through the clinic.

**Immune regulation:** Once the triggers have been identified, it is usually necessary to improve the immune system's balance. This involves ensuring that the stomach and gut environments are healthy and using herbs which bring the immune function back into line such as Siberian ginseng, Astragalus and Echinacea. Low grade bacterial infections can also aggravate the lungs leading to wheeziness. In this case, it is important to resolve the infection and this is where the immune stimulating and antibacterial herbs come into their own. At times it may be necessary to use an antibiotic to clear the initial infection, but building up the immune system to avoid re-infection is still vital. If using an antibiotic, ensure you take a top quality probiotic alongside it so your gut flora is not destroyed. We have specific strains of bacteria available through the dispensary which are proven to improve the immune system regulation and reduce the side effects of antibiotics. Protecting your gut flora is very important because they are an integral part of the regulatory mechanism which keeps your immune system in good shape.

Herbs which open the airways, improve digestive function and reduce the levels of associated inflammatory chemicals have a part to play as well while addressing the root causes, and most of these are safe to use along side conventional asthma medications. Some of the primary ones I use are Coleus, Grindelia and Euphorbia. Coleus may also be used to improve the efficacy of some conventional asthma medications, and is especially good in that it opens the airways and supports stronger heart function. The best forms to use are the liquid tincture or a high concentrate tablet and both are available through the dispensary. Anti-allergy herbs such as Perilla, Turmeric, Chamomile and Feverfew are also very valuable because these are effective in reducing the overall sensitivity to allergens in the immune system. (It is essential when using Coleus that professional guidance is sought where other types of medication are being used as there may be some contra-indications.

