Asthma and Complimentary Therapies

There are many complementary therapies that are available to people with asthma. Some people find these therapies helpful, but keep in mind that there has not been as much research in complementary therapies as much as conventional medicine.

If you decide to try any of the following therapies for your asthma, speak to your doctor first. This will ensure you can monitor your asthma with your doctor before, during and after the trial, to best assess whether the complimentary therapy has helped, harmed or had no effect on your asthma control.

These therapies are designed to complement your existing medical treatment – not replace it. Never abandon your medication and mainstream management techniques. It is important that you inform both your doctor and complementary therapist of other treatments and/or medications that you are using.

**Acupuncture**
Acupuncture is an ancient Chinese treatment of inserting very fine needles into specific parts of the body to influence the flow of energy (qi) around and through the body. Traditional Acupuncturists believe that gentle stimulation at precise acupuncture points with applied pressure on the basis of correct diagnosis, will aid the body's own defensive and self healing systems, thus promoting and maintain good health. Based on current evidence, there is insufficient evidence to make recommendations about the value of acupuncture as a treatment for asthma.

**Herbal Therapy**
There are a variety of different herbal therapies available including ayurvedic medicines, traditional Chinese medicine and naturopathy.

There is some evidence showing that some herbs could be beneficial. However, more research is required because their effects and safety are not yet fully understood. Herbs can be powerful and should be treated with as much respect as pharmaceutical drugs. Always discuss the use of herbs with your doctor first before making a decision to minimise contraindications of treatments and potential triggers.

**People with asthma should never take echinacea or royal jelly.**
They can have serious side effects for people with asthma and other allergies. Royal jelly has caused breathing difficulties, asthma attacks, severe allergic reactions and even death. Australia's Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has issued a warning to people with asthma about the possible effects of royal jelly. Supplements including Vitamin C, the mineral magnesium and fish oils have found to be helpful in some studies, but not in others. Always discuss these treatments with your doctor.

**Buteyko breathing method**
The Buteyko breathing method is a system of breathing exercises based on the theory that people with asthma lose too much carbon dioxide through over-breathing. Research has shown that following the use of the Buteyko method, there was no improvement in lung function or reduction in attacks in people with asthma. However, some studies have shown that the Buteyko method can be helpful enough to allow some people to reduce their reliever medication use.

More research is needed and it is advisable to remain on your medication and speak to your doctor before commencing the Buteyko method.
Yoga
This is an ancient Indian practice using postures and movements, performed with breathing techniques to help relaxation and can increase fitness. One form of yoga, Pranayama yoga, has been studied and found to be effective in reducing asthma attacks and making the person less sensitive to certain allergens or triggers. This may relate to the relaxation aspect of yoga.

Chiropractic
Chiropractic medicine is expert manipulation of the spine. Some research has shown that chiropractic has a beneficial effect on airway circulation and lung capacity. As with other complementary therapies, more research is needed in this area.

Hypnosis and meditation
Hypnosis is a deep state of relaxation that allows the patient to focus their complete attention on one thing or idea. Hypnosis is helpful in some cases, particularly for reducing stress, but not all people can be hypnotised. Relaxation techniques such as meditation or visualisation could be worthwhile if stress is a trigger.

Homeopathy
This includes preparing a special medicine containing tiny amounts of the allergic substance. The patient then takes the medicine and ‘trains’ their immune system to recognise the allergen as safe. There is no strong evidence showing that usual forms of homeopathy for asthma are effective. Until stronger evidence exists for the use of homeopathy in the treatment of asthma, we are unable to make recommendations about homeopathic treatment.

Things to remember
- Although some people find these therapies helpful, there has not been as much research into complementary therapies compared to conventional medicine.
- Managing your asthma includes avoiding exposure to your known allergens and other triggers, as well as medications prescribed by your doctor.
- It is handy to keep a diary of your asthma symptoms throughout the year to help identify your triggers and monitor the effects of any complimentary therapies you may be trying.

Where to get help
- Your doctor, pharmacist or other health professional.
- Australian Natural Therapist Association (ANTA) W: www.australianaturaltherapistassociation.com.au
- National Asthma Council (NAC) W: www.nationalasthma.org.au
- The Asthma Foundation of Victoria: T: (03) 9326 7088 E: advice@asthma.org.au W: www.asthma.org.au

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