

Asthma and Allergies

Changes in the air...

For many people, especially children, drugs such as bronchodilators and nebulisers are a familiar part of life well before their 3rd birthday.

Autumn is not often thought of as a time for asthma and allergies; however any change in season and especially colder temperatures can set them off.

Most people are well aware of the symptoms of asthma – a wheeze and/or cough accompanied by varying degrees of breathing difficulty. Sometimes, particularly in very young children, there is no audible wheeze just a nagging but exhausting cough. Some children will cough so much that it causes them to vomit. It's important to note that a wheeze doesn't have to be loud to be a problem. Tiredness is also often an underlying symptom – this is caused by reduced oxygen levels and the extra effort needed in trying to breathe, which can also lead to poor sleep.

Some asthma triggers include:

- Dust, pollen, dry air, air pollution, allergens, mould, pets, exercise and weather change
- House air-conditioning, household chemicals, colds/flu's, emotions, food, heating, hormones, medications, sex, smoking and stressful events
- Preservatives, especially 220, 221, 222, 223 and 224, tartrazine, colourings, additives etc

So what's actually happening?

Asthma occurs when a particular part of our immune system is out of balance. Our immune system is designed to protect us from infections and keep us healthy. Allergy occurs when your immune system mistakes something that is normally harmless as being a threat and while 'protecting' you from it, creates a strong inflammatory response. This response is what produces the symptoms you experience as an allergic or asthmatic response. In asthma this inflammation presents as difficulty in breathing.



So what can we do about it?

When treating asthma it's not simply about using a band-aid solution and ignoring the underlying problem. It's about finding out why your body is triggering a response and how to avoid this happening in the first place. It is a common misconception that this problem begins and ends with the lungs alone. The health of the body in general, and in particular the immune system, needs to be looked at as the first step in understanding the real nature of asthma.

How natural therapies can help...

Natural therapies works extremely well on a preventative level with absolutely no side effects except effective asthma management and a healthier you! We build up your immune system and gastrointestinal system (GIT) to prevent the attacks happening in the first place! Having a strong and healthy GIT full of good gut bacteria (probiotics) and a lesser controlled amount of 'bad' bacteria, as well as a healthy bowel lining will prevent many triggers being able to cause a reaction. A first line of defence against asthma and allergies is to detoxify and repair your bowels, cleanse your blood and get that liver detoxing your body from harmful toxins! Get yourself clean and stay that way!

There is a very unattractive term us natural practitioners use called 'leaky gut' sounds gross, well it is. This sounds like something is leaking out of the gut and it is – harmful and harmless substances are leaking through your gut lining, into your blood stream, without being converted into compounds your body can actually utilise for better health. When your immune system picks up these unconverted foreign particles it mounts a very strong immune response showing itself as either an allergic reaction or an asthmatic reaction.

Babies and children...

One of the most important reasons that you breastfeed your child for at least the first 6 months of the child's life is because of the benefits of your colostrum. This amazing superfood helps build the babies immune and digestive system. If you cannot breastfeed I highly recommend using goat or sheep's milk formulas, and a good quality children's probiotic, which are readily available at natural health food stores. Our bodies have a much easier time digesting the proteins in the goat and sheep's milk than from a cow – simple!

In terms of children with asthma their little bodies may not have a strong enough immune or digestive system to correctly respond to allergens, certain foods and food additives – which if we're being honest we too frequently allow into children's diets. Many children also have a hard time digesting dairy and wheat, and these are 2 very common triggers for asthma and allergies. If you do have a child who is prone to asthma or allergies it is often worth cutting dairy and wheat out of their diets to at least see how their symptoms change or don't. It is difficult sometimes and certainly made difficult by advertising, but natural food sources are always the best alternative for an asthma and allergy prone child.

Oh, I cannot stress strongly enough the wide spread effects sugar has on a child's health. Think of it as a 'toxin' next time you give them a lolly or some cordial....READ your labels! Have you ever seen a child whose behaviour gets better after a sugar fix?!

Ok let's talk about the drugs and their effects on your body:

Firstly I need to stress that it is essential to have a reliever/puffer/ such as Ventolin on hand in case of sudden attacks and severe cases of asthma. Combining drug therapy with natural medicine can be the most beneficial therapy. In the case of a severe asthma attack getting to the emergency department is imperative. Fast efficient medical treatment saves lives.

Bronchodilators (Relievers) such as Ventolin work by opening the airways and relaxing the smooth muscles which surround the airways enabling easier breathing.

Continual use of Bronchodilators however is discouraged because their overuse increases airway sensitivity, worsening the underlying asthma. It is also important to know that aerosol drugs often contain propellants such as fluorocarbons, and that many elixirs contain preservatives, artificial colouring, sugar and flavours (including tartrazine). Hey I think I mention those words under triggers causing asthma and allergic attacks...hmmmm?

Preventers of which there are two types, non-steroidal and steroidal work by reducing inflammation in the airwaves.

Long term side effects of inhaled steroids...are you ready...

Puffiness, increased appetite, mood swings, raised blood pressure, thinning of bones, yes you read it folks thinning of bones, easy bruising, slowed growth, glaucoma and cataracts. Wow?! Scary stuff really. As mentioned earlier I strongly recommend having a puffer on hand in case of emergencies – it can save you or your loved one's life. Otherwise let's deal with the causes naturally and without harm to the body! There are so many alternatives that need to be looked at before you or your child is put on a drug based asthma management plan. Drugs can make asthma worse by covering up the symptoms rather than fixing what is the root problem.

Mucolytics work on breaking down the mucous. There is some danger with this drug as a significant increase in liquefied mucous may occur after use and bronchospasm can worsen. It may cause side effects such as mouth inflammation, nausea and excess nasal mucous.

Finally, medications are exempt from labelling laws; therefore additives are not listed on the bottles. In my professional opinion the best alternative is to use medications only in emergencies and instead to focus on creating healthy bodies.

The reality is that asthma and allergies are an increasing problem in our society. In Australia we have one of the highest rates of asthma in the world. In fact over 10% of the population suffers from asthma in some form. There is a lot of evidence coming to light that as we increase our exposure to preservatives, chemicals and medications we will see a further increase in the prevalence of asthma and allergies. There are healthy alternatives.

So my best advice to you is to seek naturopathic help for the prevention and control of asthma and allergies naturally!

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