



Top 12 naturopathic tips for asthma sufferers

By Jennifer Cochran (Naturopath)

Asthma attacks are characterised by **hypersensitivity of airways** and associated symptoms including **recurrent shortness of breath, cough and expectoration of thick mucus**. Diagnosis is confirmed by a prolonged expiration phase and blood tests indicating increased eosinophils, increased serum IgE or food/inhalant allergy tests. There is no known cure and many people require medications to treat severe attacks. However, **diet & lifestyle modifications** along with **nutritional & herbal treatments** can reduce the frequency and severity of attacks:

1. **Identify your triggers:** In general, triggers may be either **non-allergic** such as **exercise, chemicals, fumes, cold air, infection and emotional upset**, or **allergic**. An **allergic response** is mediated by an immune response and an increase in IgE upon exposure to substances such as **dust mites, moulds, particular foods, pet hair, pollens** etc. Some triggers such as **cigarette smoke** may have a strong, but non-allergic irritant effect in some people as well as an allergic effect in others.
2. **Avoid environmental triggers:** This may involve assessing the home and **minimising dust & dust-mites** by removing carpets, choosing **low-allergenic bedding, feather-free pillows & cushions, avoiding smoking** and using **an air purifier and/ or humidifier**. Maintaining a **comfortable temperature** with air-conditioning can help to avoid cold air which can trigger nocturnal attacks. Staying home on a cold, windy day and avoiding walking down busy roads can reduce exposure to **cold air** and **traffic fume** triggers. Modifying **exercise** routines can help to reduce asthma attacks triggered by excessive exercise. Where **stress** or **emotional upset** is a trigger, a stress management programme may be beneficial.
3. **Choose unprocessed foods:** **Avoid all processed foods** and instead choose fresh meats, vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts & seeds and filtered drinking water. The simple fact is that processed foods contain many colourings and preservatives, which can trigger symptoms in asthma sufferers. It may also be beneficial to follow a **vegan diet** and to **avoid Genetically Modified (GM) foods** which may contain components which cause a reaction.
4. **Read the label:** If you do buy processed products, be vigilant about reading food labels and **avoid all food colourings and preservatives**. In particular, avoid **sulphur/sulphite**-containing **wines** and **dried fruits** such as **dried apricots and apples**, which are commonly preserved with **sulphites**. Label numbers to especially watch out for include number **220** (sulphur dioxide (SO₂)) and **221-228** which all contain sulphites. Other food additives to especially avoid include: **tartrazine (102)**, **sorbates/sorbic acids (200-203)** **parabens and benzoates (210 – 218)**, **nitrites/nitrates (249-252)** flavour enhancers such as **glutamates (621-625)** found in over 10,000 foods and **gallates (310-312)**. I highly recommend buying a pocket reference such as Bill Statham's **Chemical Maze** to take shopping with you.
5. **Try a food rotation or elimination diet:** True **food allergies** are relatively easy to identify because an immediate onset of symptoms commonly occurs after the consumption of certain foods such as **egg, fish, shellfish, nuts and peanuts**. On the other hand, **food sensitivities** can be more difficult to identify because a delayed onset of symptoms can occur up to 3 days after exposure to the food. Common foods associated with sensitivities/intolerances include **milk, chocolate, wheat and citrus and food colourings**. A food elimination diet starting by removing one or more of suspected food triggers from the diet for a week or so can be useful to determine if asthma symptoms improve without exposure to that food. Anyone sensitive to **aspirin** should also consider avoiding **high-salicylate foods** including many **berries, prunes, pineapple, apricot, dried sultanas and currants, rockmelon, tomato products, zucchini, capsicum, peppers, almonds, peppermint, spices, teas and alcohol**. **IgG food sensitivity testing** can also be used to help identify specific food sensitivities. Ask your preferred health professional for **food allergy/inhalant testing** recommendations to help identify your particular food triggers.
6. **Improve digestion:** Many asthmatics have **low stomach acid** (hypochlorhydria) which reduces the ability to digest foods properly. Hydrochloric acid levels in gastric acid can be boosted with a small quantity of **lemon water** or **apple cider vinegar** before meals. In some cases a **digestive enzyme formula** containing betaine hydrochloride may be required.

7. **Improve gut health:** Many asthmatics have **imbalanced bowel flora** from frequent antibiotic use, which causes gut inflammation and **increased intestinal permeability or 'leaky gut'**. In particular, **Candida overgrowth** is commonly associated with asthmatics and is characterised by **chronic fatigue, gastrointestinal problems including bloating and cramps, vaginal yeast infections, poor immunity, allergies and carbohydrate craving**. Leaky gut, as the name suggests, enables the 'leakage' or absorption of oversized food particles which can overwhelm the immune system. A **Comprehensive Digestive Stool Analysis (CDSA)** can be used to evaluate digestive function, small intestinal overgrowth and leaky gut syndrome and a urinary test can confirm **intestinal permeability** status. Dietary, nutritional and herbal treatments including a low carbohydrate diet, antimicrobial and mucoprotective herbs, glutamine & probiotics can all help to improve gut integrity.
8. **Reduce inflammation:** asthma is an inflammatory disorder of the airways, which may improve by increasing intake of antiinflammatories including **omega-3's** found in **fish oil, oily fish such as salmon, tuna, herring & mackerel** and for the vegetarians, in **flaxseed and sea buckthorn oils**. **Flavonoids** and **vitamin C** can also reduce inflammation by inhibiting histamine release from mast cells. Flavonoid intake can be increased by supplementation or by including **onions, garlic, raw cacao & chocolate, berries** and various other fruits & vegetables in the diet. It is also important to **avoid inflammatory foods** such as **saturated animal fats** and **trans-fatty acids** (check labels!) which can offset the benefits of your increased omega-3 intake!
9. **Buteyko breathing** has been shown to help asthmatics who simply don't breathe correctly. Trials in groups who used the Buteyko method for just 6 weeks reported up to 90% reduction in medication usage and improved quality of life after 6 weeks. While it can be difficult to find a Buteyko practitioner in Perth, online resources such as www.buteykoselfteach.com provide further information.
10. **Genetic Profiling:** Asthma sufferers have been found to have a 'less favourable' genetic variant for the body's most powerful antioxidant, **Glutathione S-transferase**. This reduces the ability to deal with oxidative stress (i.e. quench free radicals). This gene can be tested for with a Fitgenes genetic profile: <http://www.jennifercochran.com.au/Fitgenes-Genetic-Profiling.html>. Treatment includes the use of nutrigenomic products to help compensate for 'less favourable' gene variants by 'switching-on' DNA to enhance the body's response to oxidative stress.
11. **Herbal treatments to reduce acute symptoms:** several herbs are particularly effective for **reducing respiratory spasm & cough** and **improving bronchodilation and expectoration** (to get mucous out). Herbs for treating acute symptoms include **elecampene, licorice & thyme**.
12. **Herbal treatments to reduce chronic asthma/boost immunity:** many herbs with **immune-enhancing, anti-viral, anti-catarrhal, anti-allergic, anti-inflammatory or mucoprotective properties** can be beneficial. Beneficial herbs include **echinacea, andrographis, euphrasia, ginkgo, golden seal, licorice and baical skullcap**. Where **stress or emotional upset** triggers symptoms, herbs with **adaptogenic, adrenal tonic, sedative and nervine** properties such as **rhodiola, licorice, passionflower & valerian** can be beneficial. It is recommended to consult a naturopath or herbalist to discuss the most appropriate herbal treatments for your symptoms.

Call **9375 1300** to make an appointment to discuss your asthma symptoms and the best natural treatment options.

Yours in health & wellness,

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