



Natural Solutions for Asthma

by Michael Gorman, DC, ATC, CSCS

The topic of asthma seems so prevalent nowadays, I think everyone knows someone who has it, and has experienced its negative impact. According to Tedd Koren, DC, "Asthma causes more time to be lost from school than any other pediatric disorder, and is now attributed to causing up to 5,000 deaths a year." This is a serious problem. It is dear to my heart as I spent a good majority of my life with asthma, until taking a holistic approach towards my own health. My intention is not to explain how to diagnose, treat, or cure asthma, as chiropractors do not treat disease. It is intended, rather, to explain some of its possible root causes, and some specific steps that can be taken to help with its support and prevention. The underlying premise of natural healthcare is that the body heals itself; you just have to remove the blocks and supply what it needs to do so. By having a thorough understanding of the anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, and neurology of the human body, we can look at all of the factors associated with asthma. This approach is a functional or holistic approach to healthcare, the one in which I am adopting. This is looking at how each part of the body is working and interacting with all the others. It looks at the body as a whole: Physically, biochemically, nutritionally, and emotionally. Lastly, this approach realizes there is a wide spectrum between death, disease, the onset of symptoms, and optimal health. The course of this continuum between optimal health and disease can be somewhat predictable, and doesn't just happen overnight. Therefore, as we will see, asthma is not something that you are unlucky enough to just catch.

According to the Stedman's Medical dictionary, "Asthma is a condition of the lungs in which there is widespread narrowing of the airways". I am choosing not to emphasize the traditional approach to asthma, but emphasize some concepts of which you may not be aware. Please always follow the advice of a licensed physician before making any changes to any therapy or medication you are currently undergoing. According to George Goodheart, DC, the founder of the advanced diagnostic system called Applied Kinesiology, "Asthma is not a disease entity. It is rather a combination of symptoms that alters the ability of the organism to react to stress. The stress may be allergic, neurologic, or psychologic, or a combination of all of them." Part of the difference in approaches lies in the concept of diagnosis.

A big part of the problem with traditional diagnosis is doctors are forced to put different symptoms into a clearly defined category for the purpose of insurance coding. The problems in the human body do not always perfectly fit into these categories. With this approach, most diagnoses are based on recommendations that lead to one of two things: medications and surgery. To quote Abraham Maslow, "If the only tool you have is a hammer, everything starts to look like a nail." With all their side effects and complications, we clearly want to save those for emergency situations, as they were originally intended. Although these are great for emergencies, this is the exception, not the norm. Remember, our bodies do not suffer from a deficiency of medications. This mentality is part of why, according to the World Health Organization, "The U.S. spends more per person on health care than any other country, yet in overall quality its care ranks 37th in the world."

A detailed look at the physiology of an asthmatic patient is beyond the scope of this article; however we will look at it briefly. The adrenal glands, our glands that respond to all stressors, are usually the biggest culprit in asthma. They produce the hormones that usually keep the lungs and bronchi open. In an asthmatic, these normal mechanisms do not work properly. The lungs become constricted and it becomes difficult to get the appropriate amount of air into the lungs. The traditional approach is to give a steroid inhaler, which then dilates and opens the lungs, making it easier to breathe again. This works wonderful for emergencies and saves many lives every day. However, by giving a steroid medication on an ongoing basis, we are essentially "whipping a tired horse." Much like caffeine when we are fatigued, we get a short-term band aid that can further complicate the situation as a whole, and does not address the root problem. Let's look at how we can use different biochemical mechanisms to our advantage.

We can take a look at the actual mechanisms of different therapies or treatments on the biochemistry of the body. If a patient says that something works or does not work, whether it be a drug, vitamin, therapy, etc., we can oftentimes figure out what mechanism is being served or not served, and can ascertain where the imbalance or deficiency lies. Medications, for example, are developed based on how the human body works, so by knowing if they help with a symptom, you can sometimes determine where the breakdown lies within the body, and attempt to support it naturally as well. By working together for the patient, many times a natural doctor can support what the traditional allopathic doctor is doing, and the allopath is able to safely wean many patients off of their medications as their overall health and resilience becomes increased.

It is the adrenal glands in the body that should make some of the body's own hormones that partly control proper function of the lungs. In fact, the adrenal glands are responsible for making the hormones epinephrine and norepinephrine. These typically act as stimulants to help aid in getting more oxygen into the

lungs. When administered properly, steroid inhalers are designed to replace this natural process. The adrenal glands also make three main types of steroids: glucocorticoids—which assist in the control of sugar and carbohydrate metabolism; mineralocorticoids—which primarily control water balance; and androgen hormones—which produce sex hormones of estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone. Therefore, a problem with the adrenal glands can be responsible for any symptoms associated with any of these steroid functions in the body. It can result in problems with blood sugar, dehydration or water retention, or the reproductive system. For example, many female athletes who are under stress and overtraining do not menstruate. This is due to the relationship of stress and the adrenal glands losing their ability to produce sex hormones. Many think this is normal, but it most definitely is not. As I teach my patients all the time...There is a big difference between symptoms being common, and symptoms being normal. There are always physiological reasons for every symptom, dysfunction, and disease process; and it is not just because you are "getting older".

In traditional medicine, doctors can check the adrenal glands for Addison's disease, which is >90% of the adrenal glands tissue destroyed or not able to function. But like most tests in traditional medicine, it measures pathology or disease, not dysfunction. Therefore, you might have many dysfunctions in your body with various systems for years and years that go undetected. Ruling out disease and serious pathology is very necessary; however these tests are not an indication of health status, but merely of disease. If patients in general were assured of that simple fact, that most doctors are measuring disease, and not health, more people would be willing to make lifestyle changes, instead of thinking they are healthy or there is nothing else that they can do.

Aside from blood work, many of these adrenal gland imbalances can be assessed by tests such as saliva hormone tests and other in-office measurements. Another method is through Applied Kinesiology muscle testing assessment. This method addresses the relationships between various muscles of the body to various organs, glands, nerves, and blood vessels through their acupuncture and nervous system relationships. This is a non-invasive way of assessing function of the adrenal glands, always used in addition to all the traditional methods, and determining what may be indicated to help the patient's particular situation.

In order to get the adrenal glands working adequately, we have to realize their role in dealing with stress. Stress is actually broken down into four categories: physical, biochemical, emotional, and thermal. Most of us only think of stress as emotional in nature. With some emotional stressors seemingly out of our control, we then think that stress cannot be controlled and is out of our hands. However, our body does not know the difference between any of these four stressors, and reacts the same no matter what the source.

Therefore, each type of stress has a cumulative effect on the body, and each stressor is like pouring water into a bucket. When the water starts to overflow the bucket, we experience symptoms, whether it is asthma, allergies, pain, or any other symptoms. The key is to eliminate or reduce as many controllable stressors as possible. This enables the adrenal glands to be able to adequately do their job and prevent the constriction of the lungs. For example, exercise is normally considered good for you, but can be a stressor if not done correctly. Many times the improper exercise, along with all the other cumulative stressors, can be a source of the bucket to overflow; and then "exercise-induced asthma" is experienced.

I have found many people over train and cause more stress to their body than good. They are creating lactic acid to form and

causing their body to secrete the hormone cortisol, which is the negative hormone associated with stress. This cortisol is the same hormone that should be reduced by proper exercise in the first place. Although they appear to be physically fit, it is at the cost of being unhealthy overall. We have all heard of the runner or athlete who appears healthy, and dies suddenly one day of a heart attack. One simple thing to ensure you are not over training is to get a heart rate monitor, and not go above the formula of 180 beats per minute minus your age. This formula is from Phil Maffetone, DC, who has treated and successfully coached many elite endurance athletes, and will be discussed in more detail in a future article.

Suggestions consist of decreasing stressors which are physical, nutritional, and emotional; as well as supply the body with whatever raw materials it may need to optimally function. The fundamental needs of the body are adequate sunlight, oxygen, pure water, vitamins/minerals, protein, and good fats. It is important to eat well and help maintain the blood sugar, so I recommend eating protein and vegetables for meals with fruit every two hours between meals. Drink at least half your weight in ounces of pure water, and do cardiovascular exercise using a heart monitor. You should avoid things labeled "diet" and "low-fat", as they are usually synthetic or loaded with sugar. There are a lot of misconceptions regarding diet and nutrition currently, and this is also intended to be a future article.

One of the biggest factors that I feel is overlooked in asthma is food and environmental sensitivities. These are not allergies that would show up on a blood test (IgG/IgE) or scratch test by an allergist, but rather subtle imbalances in the acupuncture energy system. In my opinion, they cause a lot of stress today because of frequency of exposure, since many of them we are eating on a daily basis. The following are the most common and should be avoided by most people: wheat, dairy, soy, high fructose corn syrup, sugar, sucralose (i.e. splenda), and hydrogenated fats. There are also some acupuncture techniques available to help balance the body's energy to certain sensitivities, both food or environmental, that can be utilized without the use of needles.

Breathing exercises consisting of breathing with your belly three seconds in and six seconds out helps to relax the body. This activates your parasympathetic nervous system, which is associated with rest and recovery from stress. The sympathetic nervous system is associated with acute stress, whether physical, chemical, or emotional. This is sometimes known as the fight or flight response to stress. It is the hallmark of adrenal gland dysfunction. This is because our bodies misinterpret that we are in an emergency stress state all the time, so we do not receive any recovery time to rebuild. This is analogous to back in the day when we were chased through the woods by the saber-toothed tiger. Our bodies would release epinephrine so we could run as fast as we could for miles, and save our life. The difference is that after that we would climb up a tree and sleep for two days to recover. Now we have the equivalent of the tiger chasing us all the time due to the cumulative stressors. But we have no tree to climb up and recover, so our bodies become more and more depleted over time, and things begin to dysfunction.

Some specific suggestions for supporting asthma are to take the nutrients for the adrenal gland, consisting of B-complex with more pantothenic acid, magnesium, and vitamin C, and adaptogenic herbs such as ginseng, rhodiola, and ashwaganda. There is an incredible amount of research that has found Chiropractic care to substantially help with overall stress, but specifically with asthma. This is due to its role in the communication of the nerves from the upper back to the lungs and adrenal glands. Some other things that are helpful are going to bed by 10pm and

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