



Integrative Asthma Tree

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If someone in your family suffers from asthma, you are not alone. Almost 15% of American children suffer from asthma. Over the last 50 years, it has become even more common suggesting there are likely some environmental or behavioral triggers.

The holistic approach to asthma management combines multiple approaches. It is important to monitor and treat acute episodes and symptoms, manage allergens and strengthen and balance our immune system. In this disorder, the body is in an inflammatory state. Imagine that your body is a bucket with a hole in the bottom that is slowly filling with water and emptying out of the bottom. The water is a symbol for the inflammation in your body. If water flows in slowly, the body can handle it and water flows out the bottom and the bucket never overflows. But if there is too much water (inflammation) pouring in, the bucket can overflow and cause symptoms. Our goal with asthma management is to decrease the baseline inflammation (water in the bucket), so we have more of a buffer for when inflammation increases.

Let's tour the branches of the healing tree and discuss the variety of ways we can improve our asthma control naturally. Please do not make any changes without first speaking to your doctor. Never remove or change any medications without first consulting with your physician. These recommendations are meant to complement (but not replace) your current therapy.

The Healing Tree

Branch #1- Nutrition

Nutrition is truly the cornerstone of our health. Excessive and unhealthy eating leads to overweight and obesity and nearly all health conditions are worsened. In traditional

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Chinese medicine, the lungs are intimately related with the large intestine and any issues with digestion can affect the lungs.

Eating an anti-inflammatory diet is recommended. This means eating more fruits, vegetables, fiber, whole grains, organic meats, fish and drinking water. You shouldn't consume large amounts of processed foods, preservatives, coloring or dyes, butter/margarine, dairy, gluten, artificial flavors, and soda or juice.

Food can trigger asthma and allergies. It is prudent to avoid known triggers. Consider working with a nutritionist and trialing an elimination diet (restrict major allergenic foods such as gluten, dairy, soy, corn, nuts, shell fish for a few weeks). There is some evidence that compounds in onions, red peppers, spicy foods or spices such as horseradish, mustard and chili peppers reduce histamine release. Coffee used to be a treatment for asthma in 1800's as caffeine is chemically related to some asthma medications.

Branch #2 – Physical Activity

The cardiovascular benefits of exercise are well known. Swimming is an excellent exercise for those with asthma. In Ayurvedic (Indian) Medicine, yoga is recommended as a comprehensive approach to healthy living. Particularly, pranayama or yogic breathing exercises can be helpful in improving total lung capacity. Everyone should aim for 30-60 minutes of moderate exercise at least two times a week, but you can never really have enough, so get outside and have fun!

Branch #3 – Environment

Avoid known triggers as much as possible including tobacco smoke, pets, cockroaches, mold, and dust mites. To reduce airborne triggers and dust mites, purchase a HEPA air filter, remove or treat as much carpeting and drapery as possible, especially from the child's room. Clean the home frequently. Use hypoallergenic bedding and change and wash them weekly with warm water. If you have a pet allergy, do not allow the pet to sleep in your room. Keep the windows closed between 6am-12pm when pollen counts are the highest. Run a dehumidifier in your room. Both dust mites and mold thrive in humid environments.

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You can add air cleaning plants to your home. Some examples of those include: Spider Plants, Philodendrons, Garden Mum, Dracaena, Ficus/Weeping Fig, Peace lily, Boston Fern, Snake Plant, Bamboo Palm, Aloe Vera, Gerbera Daisy, Golden Pothos, and Chinese Evergreen.

Branch #4 – Mind/Body

Stress can be a major asthma trigger. Mind body therapies to reduce stress include meditation, autogenic training, guided imagery, biofeedback, hypnosis, and music therapy.

Branch #5- Allergy Testing and Desensitization

Consider obtaining allergy testing to elucidate any sensitivities you may have. If appropriate, allergic desensitization therapy can be very helpful for children who are triggered by specific airborne or food allergens.

Branch #6 – Supplements

- A) Vitamin C – Naturally obtained in citrus fruit and strawberries. It has been shown to decrease exercise induced asthma as much as 50%.
- B) Vitamin D – Supplementing can reduce the risk of a flare by up to 50%.
- C) Magnesium – It can significantly reduce symptoms. High dose magnesium is a well-established treatment for severe asthma exacerbations. It is a natural bronchodilator and mast cell stabilizer. Try to increase magnesium in the diet (beans, lentils, cereal, nuts, brown rice, spinach).
- D) Omega 3 Fatty Acid – It has been shown to decrease exacerbations as DHA reduces inflammation. Consider two meals per week of organic salmon, mackerel, sardines, or tuna.
- E) Probiotics increase the amount of good bacteria in our gut, decrease inflammation and help us digest and absorb food more easily. Klaire, Florastor Kids, Nature's Way, Culturelle, Metagenics and Orthomolecular make excellent probiotic supplements.

Branch #7 – Herbs

There are a number of herbs that may be useful for asthma. Licorice root, Chinese

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skullcap, angelica, and cordyceps have been shown to decrease inflammation. Kan Herbs, makes an excellent product for children called windbreaker which uses multiple Traditional Chinese herbs.

Turmeric is used for numerous conditions in Ayurvedic medicine and has very powerful anti-inflammatory effects. Consider drinking golden milk. There are many variations of golden milk, but generally it combines milk (almond, coconut, dairy, etc), turmeric, cinnamon and honey (if above 1 year old). You can google many recipes. Check out an example at wellnessmama.com.

Quercetin, Bromelain and stinging nettle have anti-histamine and anti-inflammatory actions. Ortho Molecular makes an excellent chewable, D-Hist Junior, that contains all of these with vitamin C and NAC.

A traditional tea used in Ayurveda and TCM is licorice tea. Use 1 teaspoon of licorice root, and boil in cup of water. Add 5-10 drops of maharayan oil or ¼ teaspoon of ghee. Take sips q5-10 min if having asthma exacerbation or drink daily for prevention.

Home steam inhalation can help soothe irritated airways. Thyme can be added for additional benefit. Caution should be taken with adding oils to steam inhalation as some may exacerbate symptoms.

Branch #8 – Therapies

Massage has been shown to help relax patients and improve asthma symptoms. Acupuncture has been used for thousands of years in China to treat asthma. There are several lung points that can be utilized to help bring the body into balance. Magnetic acupuncture with no needles has also been shown to be effective. You can also learn to massage the appropriate points and give massages daily.

Branch #9 – Homeopathy

Common asthma homeopathics include Lobelia, Ipecacuanha, Arsenica, Chamomilla, Pulsatilla. There are no published scientific control trials showing evidence of efficacy of these treatments though there is anecdotal evidence of their benefit in some people. Boiron makes excellent homeopathic products. At the beginning of a viral illness,

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consider using Coldcalm or oscillocoquinum to help prevent the cold from worsening and from triggering an exacerbation.

Branch #10 – Technology

There are several apps that can be downloaded to help you with asthma control. The American Academy of Pediatrics and Allergy Asthma Network have excellent apps which can be found at,

<http://www.allergyasthmanetwork.org/outreach/patient-resources/asthma-storylines/>

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/aap-asthma-tracker-for-adolescents/id962487757?mt=8>



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