Precious Breath

Opening up the airways and loosening asthma's grip with Black Seed Oil

Asthma leaves some 15 million people gasping for breath. For some, it is an annoyance that acts up once in awhile. But for others it is a life-altering and potentially fatal condition that affects daily routine.

Asthma's incidence has been steadily rising in the past four decades, more than doubling since 1980. Although the tendency to develop asthma can be genetic, both environmental and dietary factors are major causes for the increase.

For example, the incidence of asthma, especially in children, is much greater in urban areas where polluted air is more prevalent. Even more striking is that asthma is a new disease. Like coronary artery disease, asthma was virtually unknown 100 years ago, and is still rare in many developing countries.[1]

Despite popular belief, asthma is best described as a chronic inflammatory condition rather than a respiratory disease. In fact, asthma's origins have more in common with arthritis than they do with emphysema or tuberculosis. Asthma is simply a chronic inflammation of the airway rather than the joints. People with asthma have inflamed, hyperreactive airways that produce excessive bronchial mucus. After repeated asthma attacks, the airway lining becomes scarred, and immune cells, which cause or exacerbate inflammation, proliferate there.[2] Asthma eventually damages the airway permanently, making it more prone to inflammation and less functional overall.

Chronic inflammatory conditions are characterized by an excess of free radicals, which irritate and inflame tissues and cause excessive immune reactions.[3] Immune responses unavoidably produce free radicals because, in limited amounts, they are a valuable part of the defense mechanism. Antioxidants help reduce most inflammatory reactions including asthma, allergies, sports injuries and post-operative inflammation by quenching free radicals. Think of antioxidants as chemical sacrificial lambs--they preferentially react with free radicals so the free radicals don't react with the body's tissues instead.

Various environmental triggers--smoke, dust, allergens--set the inflammatory process in motion. People with low thresholds for these triggers can have frequent severe asthma attacks. Therefore, identifying inflammatory triggers and using natural products that raise thresholds reduce the frequency and severity of asthma attacks.

The Link Between Asthma and Allergies

Almost everyone with asthma has allergies, although they may not be fully diagnosed. Allergic reactions are the most common triggers for asthma attacks. Asthma and allergy attacks can be triggered by histamine, produced when special connective tissue cells called mast cells are activated by circulating immune system cells. These mobilize when infection, toxins or irritants are present.

Examples of asthma-causing allergens or irritants are air pollution, tobacco smoke, pet

dander, dust mites, pollen, perfumes, cleaning products, kerosene heaters, mold and mildew. Consequently, bakers, manicurists, hairdressers and painters as well as those who work in the construction, auto body, food-processing and petroleum-refinery industries often develop occupational asthma from breathing chemical and food vapors, flour and dust.

Food allergies can play a major role as well. Asthmatics are often allergic to common foods such as citrus fruits, dairy products, eggs, soy, wheat and yeasts. Many asthmatics are sensitive to food additives and preservatives such as benzoates, sulfites, benzaldehyde and artificial colors (especially tartrazine found in FD&C Yellow No. 5), and so should choose natural, unprocessed foods and products.

There are two types of food allergies, making diagnosis difficult. The traditional type, called immediate onset, is characterized by reactions that develop minutes after ingesting only a tiny amount of the allergenic food. Reactions are predictable and typically involve the airway, gastrointestinal tract and skin. Examples are bronchiospasms, vomiting and/or hives from eating shellfish or nuts. Immediate-onset allergies are usually caused by one to three foods and occur in less than 5 percent of the population, although 10 percent of asthmatics have them.[6]

Far more common, but harder to diagnose, are delayed-onset food allergies. These develop after 2 to 48 hours and are dependent on the amount and preparation of food eaten. Delayed-onset food allergies cause various responses from asthma to ulcers, and aren't always predictable or easily linked to the offending food. As few as three or as many as 20 foods may be involved. Delayed-onset food allergies can have cross reactions, especially among grains and legumes.[7] For example, if someone is allergic to kidney beans, then eating black-eyed peas and pinto beans instead is no solution and may eventually cause a similar allergic response.

Asthma Prevention

Identifying and avoiding the dietary and environmental factors that trigger asthma are essential parts of a natural treatment plan. Unfortunately, people can't always avoid everything that might bother them, so it is equally important to implement an aggressive nutritional supplement plan designed to raise trigger thresholds.

Asthma is exacerbated by certain nutrient deficiencies. These deficiencies stem from a poor, unsupplemented diet coupled with nutrient depletion from the stress associated with asthma and allergy attacks. Furthermore, undiagnosed food allergies, some asthma medications and candidiasis can irritate the gastrointestinal system, which reduces nutrient absorption.

Asthma is amenable to natural treatments. Asthmatics using medication should not discontinue them abruptly; instead they should work closely with a health care provider to design a plan best suited to the severity of their illness, and decrease medication doses under supervised care. Since asthma can be life-threatening, asthmatics should follow these common-sense precautions:

- Use hypoallergenic supplements.
- Avoid magnesium or vitamin C in excess of 3 g per day if kidney disease or dysfunction is present.
- Avoid fish, fish oil or shark-liver oil if fish allergies are suspected.
- Be cautious when supplementing medicinal herbs if fruits, vegetables, condiments, culinary herbs and spices or flower pollens trigger allergic reactions.
- Use one product at a time, and take one capsule daily, to slowly build up the dosage.

Black Seed and Asthma Relief

A Breath of Fresh Herbs

Herbal products have the potential to provide relief from many chronic inflammatory condition. Herbs can relieve inflammation because they contain antioxidant phytochemicals. Some antioxidant phytochemicals, such as the curcuminoids from standardized turmeric extract, prevent the formation of free radicals as well as quench them after they are formed.

Today's oral asthma medications inhibit lipoxygenase, meaning they interfere with the action of leukotrienes (LTs), which are biochemicals that sustain inflammatory conditions once they are triggered, and thus play a role in asthmatic bronchial inflammation. Some LTs are also strong stimulators of bronchial constriction, and mucus production--they are 1,000 times more potent than histamine. This means just a small amount of LTs can narrow the breathing passages and precipitate an asthma attack. Many medicinal plants contain phytochemicals that inhibit lipoxygenase without the dangerous side effects of pharmaceutical prescriptions. The commonly used inhalers are beta-adrenergic stimulators that relax bronchial smooth muscle, thereby mechanically opening the airway. Designed for emergency use only, they do nothing to reduce underlying inflammation. Overuse of inhalers--more than two canisters weekly--increases the risk of death from asthma by increasing side effects, which include desensitization to the medication, increased heart rate and blood pressure, headaches and blurred vision. Steroids used for asthma can cause or exacerbate diabetes, glaucoma, obesity, liver damage, abnormal cholesterol levels and heart disease.

The following herbal treatments for asthma have been shown to significantly inhibit lipoxygenase activity.

People all over the world have used Black Seed (Nigella sativa) as a primary treatment for asthma and allergies. A traditional extract blend taken with honey includes black seed (*Nigella sativa*), chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*), cinnamon (*Cinnamomum cassia*), cloves (*Syzygium aromaticum*), rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), sage (*Salvia officinalis*), spearmint (*Mentha spicata*), thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) and other herbs. Black seed, rosemary and thyme are known to inhibit the contraction of tracheal smooth muscle that is stimulated by histamine and acetylcholine. Chamomile, cinnamon, cloves,

rosemary, spearmint and thyme contain many antioxidants. Black cumin seed oil, and the black cumin phytochemicals nigellone and thymoquinone, strongly inhibit lipoxygenase and prevent the release of histamine from mast cells. The herbs in this blend also contain the lipoxygenase inhibitors caffeic acid, catechin, chlorogenic acid, hydroxycinnamic acids, kaemp-ferol, procyanidin-D2, quercetin and cinnamic acid, all of potential benefit to asthmatics.

Asthma is yet another chronic disease related to Western diets and lifestyles. While people may have a genetic tendency to develop asthma, this tendency was not expressed until after the Industrial Revolution. In other words, it seems we've brought asthma upon ourselves, and we can't rely on drugs to undo the damage. A clean environment, an unprocessed whole-foods diet, nutritional supplementation and herbal medicine are logical ways to reverse the increasing incidence of asthma.