

TO YOUR HEALTH

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DYSMENORRHEA AND OMEGA-3 FATTY ACIDS

Dysmenorrhea is severe pain associated with the menstrual cycle. Dysmenorrhea is considered to be primary when there is no other pathology affecting the reproductive system. It is considered secondary if it is due to pathology, like endometriosis. The pain in primary dysmenorrhea is believed to



be caused by the uterus contracting and from lack of oxygen in the area. Pain is usually perceived as cramps, but may be a dull, constant ache. Symptoms usually begin shortly before or during menses (bleeding). Additional symptoms may include nausea, diarrhea, frequent urination, depression or mood swings, or breast tenderness. There are some natural approaches that are helpful to women who suffer from PMS or dysmenorrhea.

A double-blind, crossover study that appeared in the *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics* (Epublised ahead of print, Jan 17, 2012), looked at 95 female subjects between the ages of 18 and 22, all with primary dysmenorrhea. They were divided into two groups. One group was given an omega-3 fatty acid supplement for three months,

and after a washout period, was given a placebo for another three months. The second group was given the placebo for the first three months and the omega-3 supplement for the second three months. The women were allowed to take 400 mg of ibuprofen for relief of severe menstrual pain. Women taking omega-3 fatty acids required less ibuprofen than those who were taking the placebo, demonstrating its benefit for pain associated with dysmenorrhea.

DYSMENORRHEA AND NATURAL HEALTH CARE

A number of studies have shown natural therapies to be effective for women suffering with dysmenorrhea. Research appearing in the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* (February 2009, 15(2): 129-132) compared the effect of ginger, mefenamic acid and ibuprofen on the pain of dysmenorrhea. The subjects of the study were 150 students over the age of 18 suffering from primary dysmenorrhea. They were divided into three groups and given 250 mg of ginger rhizome powder, 250 mg of mefenamic acid or 400 mg of ibuprofen. They took the dosage four times each day for three days; beginning with the start of their menstrual period. Dysmenorrhea symptoms decreased in all groups, and there was no difference in the amount of relief experienced by the women taking the herb or the women taking drugs. Ginger was as effective as the drug therapies, and was free of side-effects.

Other research, appearing in the *Western Journal of Surgical Gynecology* (1954;62:610-611) demonstrated the value of a combination of niacin, rutin and vitamin C for alleviating dysmenorrhea

symptoms. Eighty women between the ages of 15 and 44 took 100 mg. of niacin two time each day, increasing the frequency of the dosage to every two or three hours when symptoms were present. About 90% of the subjects experienced relief from this treatment. A combination of 60 mg of rutin and 300 mg of vitamin C seemed to potentiate the treatment. The women experienced relief for several months after the treatment was discontinued.

Magnesium has also been shown to be useful. In the journal *Zentralbl Gynakol* (1989;111:755-760). In a double-blind study, over 80% of subjects receiving magnesium for six months experienced a reduction in symptoms. The group receiving the magnesium also had a reduction in prostaglandin F2a (which inhibits progesterone production and may be implicated in dysmenorrhea).

In a study appearing in the *Indian Journal of Medical Research* (April 1996;103:227-231), either thiamin or placebo was given to 556 girls between the ages of 12 and 21, all of whom suffered from

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dysmenorrhea. The subjects receiving 100 mg/day of thiamin over a 90 day period had very good results. Most (95%) were either completely cured or most of their pain was completely relieved.

Other studies have shown the value of spinal manipulation and dietary changes. As anyone who works in natural health care knows, dysmenorrhea is one symptom that responds very well to natural health care.

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ASTHMA

Asthma is one disease where the patient can benefit from both traditional medical care and from natural health care. There are about 300 million people suffering from asthma worldwide, with asthma causing 250,000 deaths in 2007 (according to WHO). While medical intervention can save an asthmatic's life, nutrition and natural health care can improve the day to day management of the disease. Research has shown that diet can affect the severity of asthma and that certain nutrients may be of value. This is especially important considering that inhaler overuse can increase the chance of dying from an asthma attack. An article appearing in *Family Practice News* (April 15, 1993;46) stated that deaths from asthma could be cut by 50% if physicians monitored beta agonist inhaler overuse by patients. An inhaler should last one month. Other medications can contribute to asthma attacks. An article in the *Annals of Allergy* (June 1992;68:453-462) stated that drugs may be responsible for as many as 10% of asthma attacks. NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) may be responsible for 2/3 of these drug-induced attacks. Other drugs, like muscle relaxants, beta-blockers, or antibiotics can trigger asthma attacks as well.

Magnesium is nature's muscle relaxer and can help to open airways. A randomized, placebo-controlled study appearing in the *Journal of Asthma* (2010; 47(1): 83-92) looked at 55

subjects between the ages of 21 and 55, with mild to moderate asthma. They were randomly divided into two groups and given either a placebo or 340 mg of magnesium per day over a 6 1/2 month period. The severity of the subjects' asthma was evaluated using pulmonary function testing, methacoline challenge testing and subjective questionnaires about the severity of asthma and the quality of life. The researchers found that the subjects who received the magnesium were much more resistant to the methacoline challenge and also had great improvements on their pulmonary function tests. The magnesium group scored higher on the quality of life questionnaires as well.

There are many studies that show the benefit of antioxidants for reducing the frequency and severity of asthma attacks. A meta-analysis appearing in the journal *Thorax* (2009; 64(7): 610-9) found that a high intake of vitamins A and C was associated with a reduced risk for asthma. A previous article appearing in *Clinical and Experimental Allergy* (2000;30:615-627) also stated that antioxidants can play an important role in keeping asthma under control. It specifically mentions beta carotene and vitamin C as playing a role in aiding to keep airways open. Research appearing in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (1991;325(8):586- 587) found higher levels of free radicals in patients with asthma when compared to normal controls.

"We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."

Einstein

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DIET AND ASTHMA

A number of studies show that diet can improve asthma symptoms. Research appearing in the journal, *Thorax* (2006; 61(12): 1048-53) looked at the diets of 598 Dutch children between the ages of 8 and 13. It found that a diet high in fish and whole grains reduced the risk of asthma. Antioxidants in the diet seem to be especially beneficial in reducing asthma symptoms. A study appearing in the journal, *Thorax* (2006; 61(5): 388-93) looked at diet and asthma symptoms in 515 adults with asthma and 515 matched controls without the disease. It found that low intake of fruit, vitamin C and manganese increased the risk for asthma symptoms. Also, low levels of vitamin C in the serum was also associated with asthma.

Just as a good diet can reduce asthma symptoms, a poor diet can make them worse. Research appearing in the *European Respiratory Journal* (2009; 33:33-41) looked at the diets of 54,672 French women. Researchers found an increased risk of asthma attack associated with the "Western diet". Eating processed foods, pizza, and refined foods can increase the frequency and severity of asthma attacks.

Of course asthma symptoms are the result of inflammation and broncho-spasm. Magnesium, along with a good antioxidant may be useful for keeping symptoms at bay.