

**ASTHMA AND FATTY ACIDS**

TO YOUR HEALTH

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The *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (2005; 59(12): 1335-46) published an article that reviewed the research involving asthma and omega-3 fatty acid supplementation. The authors stated that fish oil supplementation may act to reduce inflammation and help to open airways.

Other research appearing in the *International Journal of Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases* (2007; 11(1): 103-9) looked at fish consumption, and the relative consumption of omega-6 and omega-3 fatty acids in 1,002 pregnant Japanese women. Increased fish consumption and consuming more omega-3 fatty acids (in relation to omega-6 fatty acids) reduced the chance of having a child with asthma.

Another study that appeared in *Clinical and Experimental Allergy* (2007; 37(11): 1616-23) looked at the dietary habits of 16,187 subjects between the ages of 23 and 54

years. It found that a small amount of fish in the diet reduced the chances for developing asthma. The subjects who never ate fish during childhood had an increased risk of developing asthma at an early age.

Pregnant women who had an increased risk for having a child with asthma were involved in research that appeared in *Pediatric Allergy and Immunology* (2004;15:517-522). The 616 women were instructed to give the newborn either 500 mg/day of fish oil or a placebo. Breast-fed infants were not given a supplement until the age of six months (there is a high concentration of omega-3 fatty acids in breast milk). The children were evaluated at 18 months of age (376 of the original group participated in the evaluation). Omega-3 fatty acid levels were measured and it was found that asthma symptoms, nocturnal coughing and doctor visits (for asthma), were reduced in those with high levels of omega-3 fatty acid in the blood.

## NUTRITION AND ASTHMA

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. Using nutrition is 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.

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 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. An 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 playing a role in helping 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.

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## ASTHMA AND VACCINES

There has been speculation that the increase in the number of asthma cases over the last two decades may have something to do with the pertussis (whooping cough) vaccine. A letter to the editor, appearing in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (1994;272(8):592-593) referred to a study of 448 children who were breast fed for the first six months of life. The children were evaluated (mean age 7.87 years). A total of 30 were determined to have asthma. Of the 243 children who had received immunizations, 26 were diagnosed with asthma. Only four of the 203 children who had not received immunizations were diagnosed with asthma, meaning that the immunized group had a more than 5x risk of developing the disease. The authors believed that the culprit was the pertussis vaccine because there were only three cases of asthma in the 112 children who did not receive the pertussis vaccine, but received all of their other vaccines.

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## MERCURY AMALGAMS

Mercury fillings have been around since around 1890. In the early 1900s, German chemist, Alfred Stock warned of mercury toxicity from the fillings. So the mercury fillings and the controversy surrounding them are not new. Mercury fillings contain 50 parts mercury, 35 parts silver and 10 parts tin, copper and zinc. In spite of the propensity of the dental profession to call amalgam fillings "silver", more than 50% of the material in them is mercury, which is toxic.

The American Dental Association has long held the belief that amalgam fillings became inert after a few days and were safe. Currently the ADA recognizes that there is some absorption from amalgam fillings, but they are still safe. The FDA recommends not placing mercury fillings in children under the age of six. The FDA has produced a lengthy report (posted on its website) that discusses the amount of mercury absorbed from fillings, the effects of mercury toxicity and methods of testing. The report cites a study performed at the University of Tübingen Health Clinic, involving 20,000 subjects with mercury fillings. On average the amount of mercury found in saliva was 11.6 mcg/L; gum chewing could triple that figure. Also, those subjects with multiple fillings tended to have higher levels. Some subjects had extremely high levels, with 1% having more than 200 mcg/L and 10% having more than 100 mcg/L.

According to research appearing in the *Journal of Dental Research* (1992;71(AADR Abstracts);284/1424) found that polishing fillings increased the mercury released from the fillings. A filling with a surface area of 25 square millimeters released over 3x more mercury vapor after being polished.

A study appearing in the *Archives of Environmental Health* (May/June, 1996;51(3):234-241) evaluated the amount of mercury in blood, hair and breast milk in 30 Swedish women six weeks after giving birth. Researchers found that the amount of inorganic mercury in the blood and breast milk correlated with the number of mercury fillings. The exposure of infants to mercury

from breast milk was found to be about half of the tolerable daily intake for adults recommended by the World Health Organization.

Research appearing in *Biological Trace Element Research* (1997;56:143-152) looked at mercury absorption from amalgams in pregnant sheep. Three ewes were given 12 mercury amalgams, containing radioactive mercury, while three other ewes (not given amalgam fillings) acted as controls. The lambs born of the ewes with the fillings had mercury (which was found primarily in the liver). Breast feeding provided the newborn lambs with additional mercury, found primarily in the kidney. Mercury crosses the placenta and into the fetus. Mercury also crosses into the breast milk.

Cadavers were examined in research appearing in the *Journal of Prosthetic Dentistry* (1987;58(6):704-707) to find the relationship between the number of amalgam fillings and the presence of mercury in nerve tissue. The data showed a positive correlation between the number of fillings and the amount of mercury found in brain tissue.

Clearly there is a relationship between mercury fillings and the absorption of mercury into the body. Also, the amount absorbed seems to vary between patients, but there is a correlation between the number of fillings and the amount of mercury absorbed. Mothers can pass the mercury on to the fetus. There currently is controversy surrounding the presence of mercury in vaccines and the increase in autism. Some experts make much of the fact that autism did not exist before the advent of vaccines in the 1940s. It might be worth noting that, although mercury amalgams have been around for 150 years, their use became widespread in the 1930s. If there is a connection between autism and mercury toxicity, it may be worth looking into mercury fillings.

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Euripides

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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 appeared in the journal, *Thorax* (2006; 61(5): 388-93) that 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.

Eliminating foods like gluten or dairy to which the patient may be sensitive is often very helpful. Many times these patients respond to digestive support, like taking HCL or enzymes. Therapies like acupuncture and chiropractic adjustments can also help asthmatic patients.

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 following the "Western diet". Eating processed foods, pizza, and refined foods can increase the frequency and severity of asthma attacks.