ASTHMA AND CHIROPRACTIC

What is asthma?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have estimated that 20 million people in the US currently have asthma. Not everyone who has asthma knows it, and not everybody who has it seeks asthma treatment.

When you have asthma, two main things are happening in your lungs: the muscles around the airways are constricted and inflamed. Constriction and inflammation narrow your airways, which cause symptoms such as wheezing, coughing, chest tightness, and shortness of breath. There is increasing evidence that, if left untreated, asthma may cause a long-term decline in lung function. The underlying parts of the disease, especially the inflammation, can be there, even in the absence of symptoms. It is important, therefore, to prevent symptoms from occurring in the first place, rather than waiting until symptoms become serious. For many patients, optimal therapy requires treating both main components of asthma.

Asthma is something that is always with you, even if you are not having symptoms. So, as soon as the symptoms go away, you may stop taking their preventative medications, not realizing that the underlying problems that are causing the symptoms in the first place require daily asthma treatment. And although there are plenty of effective medications, if you don't think they are helping, and thus don't take them, then they do absolutely no good. This is a big challenge with the preventative medications we have for asthma.

What causes asthma?

There is really no known cause of asthma. A lot of effort has been put forth to try and understand if there is a genetic basis to this disease. It definitely does run in some families, but currently, there is no consistent genetic profile in people who have it versus those who don't. We are all exposed to lots of the same things and yet, not all of us have problems. A leading theory is that it is a combination of inherited risks for the disease, as well as interaction with allergens in our environment, that develop into the disease.

There are triggers that most people are aware of, especially if they have any history of allergies. These triggers include hay fever, ragweed, cut grass, and many other things that

contain pollen. Triggers that people may not be as aware of are weather conditions such as high humidity, high temperatures, or very cold temperatures. All of these can be triggers for people with asthma. Infections such as the common cold and the flu can also trigger asthma symptoms. And then, finally, there is exercise, which can trigger asthma.

You can minimize some triggers by reducing the dust in your home. You should change sheets and bed linens weekly. Some air filters can be a big help in cutting down on dust in the home. In general, it's important to avoid exposure to strong fumes, cigarette smoke, and so forth. These can be irritants for people with asthma. The one that's often most difficult for patients with asthma is having in their home a beloved pet that may be triggering their asthma symptoms. The most effective way to eliminate this trigger is to not have the pet at all. Short of that, keeping your pet out of your bedroom or keeping it outside of the house can help cut down on some of the problems associated with pets.

There is no specific diet that will help improve asthma. It's important to eat a well-balanced diet and make sure you are getting all the vitamins and minerals that anyone would need, as well as plenty of rest. That makes sense for everybody, including someone who has asthma.

How can chiropractic help my asthma?

Spinal misalignments cause many health problems because vertebrae pinch important nerves and restrict their effectiveness. Dr. Ray Hayek conducted a trial at 16 treatment centers in Australia, involving 420 patients with an average age of 46, in an effort to find out what effects spinal manipulation has on symptoms such as depression and anxiety, general health status, and the levels of immunity. He tested the concentrations of both an immunoglobulin (IgA) and an immunosuppressant (cortisol) to gauge his results. Dr. Hayek was trying to prove that different forms of manual therapy (including massage) improve symptoms and lower cortisol levels in asthma patients.

Dr. Hayek reported that only the patient group that underwent spinal manipulation displayed significant improvement in asthma symptoms. Conducting only interviews at the treatment centers or being monitored at home did not yield these improvements. In addition, patients actually undergoing spinal manipulation displayed dramatic increases of IgA and decreases of cortisol even after asthma treatment had ceased, suggesting that the treatments affected the patients' health long term. These patients were expected to ward off subsequent asthmatic attacks.

These changes not only suggest that the effects of spinal manipulation are more far-reaching than commonly believed, but that they may be more long-term as well. The gain in health achieved after spinal manipulations were performed is expected to reduce the incidence and severity of pathogenic invasion of the airways. There would be less of a risk under these circumstances of experiencing the symptoms of asthma.