



Evidence about common complementary therapies for asthma

Source: www.nationalasthma.org.au/HTML/management/infopapers/



A panel of experts compiled the table below from a review of published clinical trials of complementary therapies used for people with asthma.

The expert panel considered the effectiveness of complementary therapies on:

1. asthma symptoms (including measures of quality of life and other subjective measures of asthma control);
2. breathing capacity; and
3. level or quantity of medication required to control asthma.

In many cases the panel concluded that there was insufficient evidence to decide whether the therapy was likely to be effective, or that the available evidence was inconsistent. In other cases there was some evidence that the treatment was effective or, alternatively, that the treatment was ineffective. However, often the available evidence was fairly weak or there was conflicting evidence. Therefore, the panel classified treatments as either “possibly” or “probably” effective (or ineffective). Some of the findings are summarised in the following table. More information may be available from your doctor, the National Prescribing Service Medicines Line or other contacts at the end of this brochure.

Complementary approaches to treatment include more than just the treatments. A number of tests are also used, often to measure toxins or bodily attributes. In many cases these have not been standardised or validated in the way other medical tests have been. Consumers should seek advice about the meaning of complementary test results. These have not been reviewed in this brochure.

Therapy	Panel's findings
Diet modification	
Omega-3 fatty acids (fish oil) Selenium supplements Vitamin C supplementation Vitamin C and E supplementation combined Oral magnesium supplements Lactobacillus acidophilus Dietary salt	Selenium supplements and magnesium supplements (in people who were deficient in magnesium) were thought to be possibly effective in improving symptoms, but not breathing capacity, in people with asthma. Of the others, on current evidence omega-3 fatty acids (fish oil) are probably ineffective as treatment for asthma and lactobacillus is possibly ineffective. There was no consistent evidence about the others. Please note: At high doses, some vitamin and mineral supplements may cause side effects such as foetal abnormalities and toxic effects. Please check the supplement with your doctor or pharmacist. There is also a brochure on Asthma and Diet in Early Childhood in this range of brochures.
Physical therapies	
Chiropractic Massage Swimming Physical training	Chiropractic is probably ineffective for asthma and physical training is possibly ineffective. There is no consistent evidence about the effectiveness of the other treatments.
Homeopathy	
Remedies derived from plants and minerals, given in extremely diluted forms according to individual patient needs	Possible beneficial effects shown for breathing capacity, and a reduction in medication required, but no clear evidence of effectiveness for asthma symptoms. Please note: products should be carefully selected and preferably carry an AUST L number.
Traditional Chinese and Japanese herbal medicines	
Herbal medicines derived from plants or plant substances, usually prescribed on an individual basis	A number of specific therapies were reviewed. Several of these are possibly effective in improving breathing capacity in people with asthma. However, there is no evidence of beneficial effects on asthma symptoms or on the requirement for other asthma medication. Please note: side effects and interactions with other medicines reported for some herbs. Please check herbal medicine with your doctor or pharmacist. Products should be carefully selected and preferably carry an AUST L or AUST R number.

Traditional Ayurvedic (Indian) medicines

Herbal medicines derived from plants or plant substances, usually prescribed on an individual basis

Several of these therapies are possibly effective in improving breathing capacity in people with asthma and some are possibly effective in relieving asthma symptoms. One, *Tylophora indica*, is probably effective in reducing asthma symptoms. Please note: side effects and interactions with other medicines reported for some herbs. Please check herbal medicine with your doctor or pharmacist. Products should be carefully selected and preferably carry an AUST L or AUST R number.

Buteyko breathing technique

System of breathing exercises focusing on nasal route of breathing, hypoventilation and avoidance of deep breaths

Short-term studies in adults show that it is probably effective in reducing asthma symptoms and reducing the amount of medication required. However, there is no evidence of effect on breathing capacity in people with asthma.

Yoga

Ancient Indian practice using physical postures, discipline of breathing, and concentration during practice

No consistent evidence of beneficial effects in people with asthma.

Breathing exercises

Various techniques

Possible beneficial effects on breathing capacity and medication requirement. No evidence of effect on asthma symptoms.

Acupuncture

Laser or fine needles used to puncture the skin at defined points

No consistent evidence of beneficial effects in people with asthma. Please note: some side effects have been reported. Care should be taken when selecting a therapist.

Hypnotherapy

Creating a trance-like state

No consistent evidence of beneficial effects in people with asthma.

Ionisation

Instrumentally boosting the positive and negative ion content of the air

Probably ineffective in reducing asthma symptoms and the amount of medication required. Please note: ionisation has been reported to worsen exercise-induced asthma.

Meditation

Techniques used to calm the mind and body

Possibly effective on breathing capacity for people with asthma. No evidence of effects on asthma symptoms or medication requirement.

Music therapy

Use of interactive music-making as a therapy to address individual emotional and developmental needs

Possibly beneficial on asthma symptoms. No evidence of benefit for breathing capacity or medication requirement.

Osteopathy

Physical manipulative therapy used to adjust misalignments of the muscles, joints and bones

No consistent evidence of beneficial effects in people with asthma. Care should be taken when selecting a therapist.

Reflexology

Application of pressure, usually to the feet, to produce therapeutic effects on other parts of the body

No consistent evidence of beneficial effects in people with asthma. Care should be taken when selecting a therapist.

Speleotherapy

A therapeutic measure which involves spending time in the pure underground air of caves or salt mines

Possible beneficial effects on breathing capacity and medication requirement. Results achieved may vary from cave to cave.

Relaxation therapy

Techniques to reduce anxiety, tension and stress

Probably ineffective in reducing asthma symptoms and the amount of medication required. May be of benefit for those with asthma worsened by anxiety. Has also been demonstrated to be useful in acute attacks.