

# Asthma

## Information Sheet

An asthma attack is characterized by spasm/contraction of the smooth muscle wall of the bronchiole tubes of the lungs. This results in wheezing and difficulty in breathing, and the normal ratio of inhalation and exhalation becomes disturbed. Overproduction of mucus also occurs – further blocking the airways.

Asthma may be caused by food allergies or hereditary factors, however ultimately this condition has its roots in the mind.

Over stimulation of the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) causes the constriction of the bronchial tubes. The PNS is regulated by the hypothalamus, which is directly controlled by our higher emotional centres. Emotional tension (i.e. worry, anxiety and stress) stimulates the PNS via the hypothalamus, thus contributing to an asthma attack. The exhalation is often very short preceding an attack making breathing difficult.

Pollution, smoking, poor posture, constipation, cold weather and mucous producing foods can aggravate the condition.

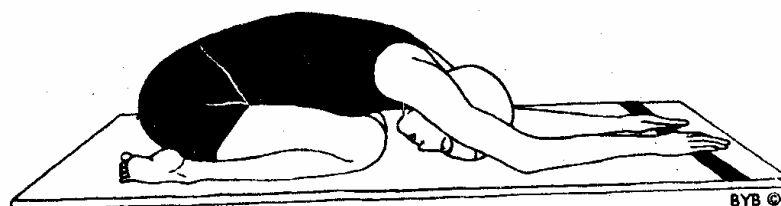
## What you can do

### Beneficial Yoga Postures:

A combination of gentle postures, breathing techniques and relaxation techniques are very effective for treating asthma – thus any general YogaHealth class would be beneficial for the prevention of asthma; however below are some specific exercises you could focus on.

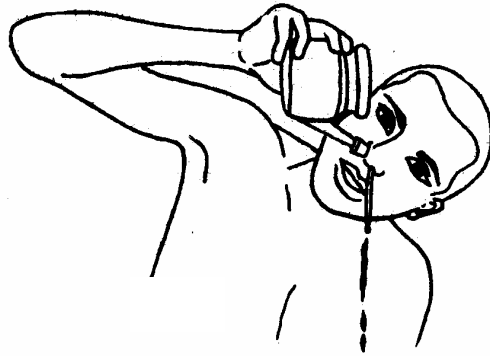
You may find that over time, you can gradually reduce the amount of medications you are taking for asthma – which is great since many of these have detrimental side effects and long term effects on the body.

Postures: Cat and Cow, Yoga Mudra, the Forward Bend pose and the Cobra pose.



### **Breathing techniques:**

- ⇒ Unless specified, breathing should always be in and out through the nostrils. If you find you are usually mouth breathing (very common with asthmatics) then Neti will be helpful to facilitate nasal breathing. Neti involves the pouring of saline solution through the nose with a special pot to help clear the nasal passages – ask your instructor for guidance.



- ⇒ It's best to start with counting with the breath and the full yogic breath. Once these are mastered Ujjayi pranayama, alternate nostril breathing and Bramhari are great. (Please ask your instructor for guidance on these).
- ⇒ Counting with the breath: breathe in for a count of 6 heartbeats and breathe out for count of 6 heartbeats. This helps to balance the inhalation and exhalation and calms the nervous system.
- ⇒ Full yogic breath: use the first half of the breath to fill the lower lobe of lungs (so the belly expands) then the second half of the breath into the middle lobe of the lungs (so the chest and rib cage expands) and then see if you can take a bit more air into the upper lobes by lifting the shoulders and upper chest – pull the belly in slightly here. Breathe out slowly and completely.

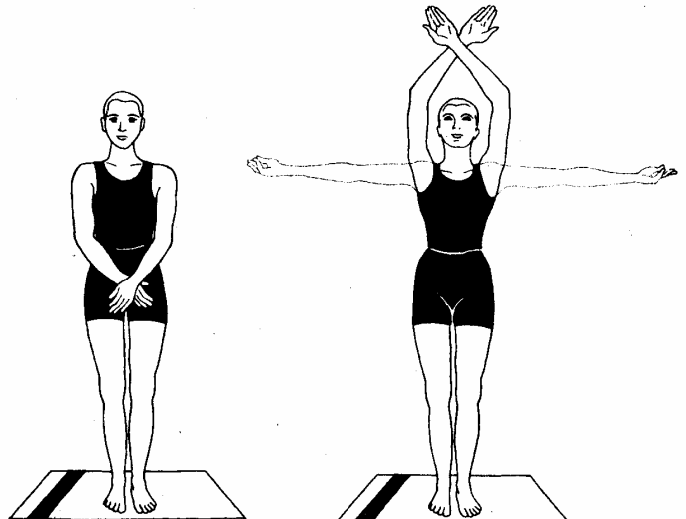
### **Relaxation:**

Any form of relaxation or meditation is excellent for asthma – however Yoga Nidra is the most effective technique you can do – check out the web site or ask your instructor about a CD.

The following exercises combine the postures with breathing and are particularly good for asthma, repeat each one 5 times:

- ⇒ Stand with the feet hip width apart and arms by sides. Breathe in slowly and deeply and raise both arms in front of the body to shoulder level and then slowly move them outward, sideways and slightly backwards. Breathe out while lowering the arms to the side of the body.

- ⇒ Stand – feet hip width apart. Cross the arms at the wrists in front of the body and breathe in slowly and deeply while raising the arms, gradually separating the wrists as the arms are stretched over the head. Then slowly lower the arms sideways while breathing out.



- ⇒ Standing – inhale deeply and hold the breath in while you tap gently but firmly with the finger tips all over the chest and sides of the body. When you are ready breathe out and relax.
- ⇒ Stand with the feet a bit wider than hip width apart and have the knees slightly bent. Float your arms above the head with the wrists relaxed. Inhale and then exhale through the mouth with the sound HAAAA as you drop the body down and lean forward from the waist - allow the hands to swing loosely between the legs.

## Other things you can try

- ⇒ Massage – assists relaxation and removes toxins.
- ⇒ Diet: remove mucous forming foods from the diet such as dairy products and high sugar foods.
- ⇒ Take steps to improve your digestion – constipation can contribute to asthma by hindering abdominal breathing. So avoid overeating, drink plenty of water and eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables.
- ⇒ Dandelion root tea is said to be beneficial for asthma and has a detoxifying effect on the liver. Drink 1-3 cups a day.