

Asthma: Natural Ways to Ease Asthma Symptoms

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Beyond Medication

If you have asthma, you know how important it is to take your medication as prescribed by your doctor. That often means using a long-term control drug every day and keeping a quick-relief inhaler handy. But managing asthma isn't only about medication. You can do several other things to help you breathe as freely and easily as possible.



Grab an Espresso

While coughing, wheezing, and trouble breathing call for your rescue inhaler, you might consider a caffeinated drink if your symptoms are mild. Caffeine is a weak bronchodilator, which means it opens your airways a bit. More research is needed, but some studies suggest that it may help your lungs work better for up to 4 hours.



Hit the Steam Room

Many people with asthma find warm air soothing. A steam bath -- in a sauna or your shower at home -- can help clear out mucus that can make it hard to breathe. One word of caution: Some people find that heat makes their asthma worse, so it's important to know your personal triggers.



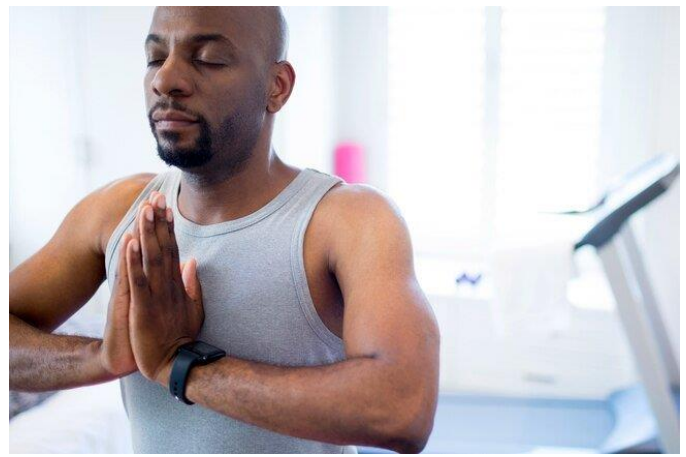
Add Spice to Your Life

Garlic and ginger have anti-inflammatory compounds that might ease your asthma symptoms. Start with fresh garlic cloves and ginger root. You can steep either one in boiling water and drink it like tea after the water has cooled, or just use these spices more often in your cooking.



Learn to Decompress

When you're stressed, all the muscles in your body tense up, including the ones in your chest. Managing that tension may mean fewer asthma flare-ups. Meditation and yoga are good options, as is tai chi, an ancient, gentle Chinese martial art. Research suggests that it can help control asthma symptoms in some people.



Keep Moving

Exercise can make your lungs stronger, but it can also be an asthma trigger, especially if you're out in cold weather. To stay safe, talk to your doctor before starting a new routine and ask if you should take medication before you get moving. Also be sure to work your way up slowly (think walking, then jogging, then running). And heed the weather: If it's cold out, cover your mouth and nose or move your workout indoors.



Eat the Rainbow

Colorful produce is rich in antioxidants like beta-carotene and vitamins C and E that help fight inflammation in your body, including in your lungs. And while you're watching your diet, be careful with sulfites, a type of preservative that triggers asthma symptoms in some people. You'll often find them in wine, dried fruit, pickles, and shrimp.



Let the Sun Shine

Many Americans are low in vitamin D, and people with severe asthma might be more likely to have this issue. Ask your doctor to test your levels. If you don't have enough, milk, eggs, and bony fish like canned salmon can help. Your body also makes vitamin D when you're in sunlight. Just remember to use sunscreen, and don't stay out too long or you could raise your chances of skin cancer.



Take Deep Breaths

Special breathing exercises can help your lungs work better. Pursed lip breathing is one option: Breathe in through your nose, then breathe out at least twice as slowly through pursed lips. Diaphragmatic breathing, also called belly breathing, is another useful technique. If you need help with these, your doctor can refer you to a specialist.



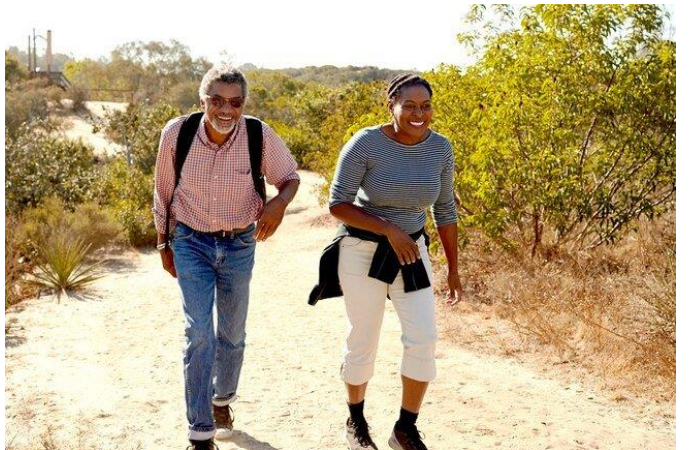
Watch the Weather

Cold or dry air may make your symptoms worse. When the mercury dips, you might drape a scarf around your mouth and nose to make it easier to breathe. Your indoor air matters, too. A dehumidifier or humidifier can help make sure your air isn't too humid or too dry. And remember to keep windows closed and run the air conditioner during allergy season to keep pollen out.



Mind the Scale

Extra fat around your chest and belly can make it harder to breathe, and fat cells can cause inflammation that may affect your airways. Cutting back on calories and fat and walking each day can help.



Know Your Triggers

Many people with asthma also have allergies, and common allergens like pollen, dust mites, and pet dander can make your asthma symptoms flare if you're sensitive to them. If you haven't recently been tested for allergies, see an allergist so you can find out exactly what bothers you and try stay away from it.



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