

EDGE ROW HERBALS

The quarterly newsletter from your local herbalist - Julie Dore
Articles, news, recipes and tips for a healthy you

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FREE

Welcome to the Autumn/Winter edition which includes information on asthma, and why it's good to spice up your life and healthy resolutions for the New Year!

ASTHMA

Asthma can be a frightening and debilitating condition and its incidence appears to be increasing with one in four children in the UK affected. There is a familial link with sufferers often having parents who suffer from either asthma, hayfever or eczema. Collectively they are known as atopic conditions or the allergic triad and are characterised by excessive activation of specialised white blood cells called mast cells. The activator is immune globulin E (IgE) which is raised in the body of an atopic person in response to an allergen. This stimulus results in an exaggerated inflammatory response that can range from the runny nose and itching eyes of the hayfever sufferer to the airway narrowing effects experienced in asthma or even a life-threatening anaphylactic shock.

An asthma attack can be triggered by a number of factors and identifying them is important in the long-term management of the condition, as there is no cure only management. Common triggers include allergies to pollen, house dust, animal fur, house mites and certain foods; irritation from cold, smoke, damp, fog and household chemicals; infections or heightened emotions especially stress, overtiredness and anxiety.

Steroid inhalers treat the symptoms but not the cause and can have long term side effects. However, by avoiding or reducing

contact with your triggers and adapting other lifestyle changes you may be able to reduce their use. Keep a food diary to ensure you have no food triggers. Dairy, wheat or certain vegetables (namely potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, aubergines, chillies, paprika, and cayenne), eggs, nuts, shellfish, red meat, chocolate, citrus fruits and yeast are known to be asthma triggers. Avoid mucus-forming foods such as dairy, bananas and orange juice. Other foods to avoid because they have been shown to trigger attacks include refined sugar, saturated and hydrogenated fats, artificial additives (especially sulphites), salt (as it causes the muscles of airway to contract), aspirin, anti-inflammatory drugs and chlorinated water.



Foods that help against the effects of asthma include unrefined sunflower oil which contains *inulin*, an effective agent against asthma. Quercetin (antioxidant) improves lung tissue and is found in apples, onions and green tea. Lycopene found in either fresh or cooked tomatoes (if they are not a trigger), have also been found to reduce the risk of an attack. Foods rich in

vitamin A, C or E, calcium, magnesium and zinc can help. As asthma is an inflammatory condition the essential fatty acid, omega-3, found in fish oils or hemp and flax seed oils is important as it has anti-inflammatory affects in the body. You should look for supplements containing a minimum of 2g of DHA+EPA. If stress is a causative factor, ensure a good dietary intake of vitamin B. Onions, garlic and ginger help open airways so alleviating attacks.



Ephedra sinica

Herbs used to treat asthma will depend on its causes. So, for example, if allergens make attacks more likely anti-allergy herbs such as Ephedra, nettle leaf, bicale skullcap (*scutellaria bicale* and not *lateflora*) and chamomile are used. Broncho-dilatory herbs include thyme and grindelia (gum weed). Anti-catarrahals and mucus membrane soothers help reduce phlegm and sooth inflamed membranes, for example ribwort plantain. Lobelia is a muscle relaxant and expectorant so very useful. Lung tonic herbs help to strengthen the lung tissues and include elecampane and verbascum. As infections can trigger attacks immune supporting herbs like Echinacea and Astragalus are important especially in the winter months. If stress is a trigger then anti-stress herbs would be needed

Other helpful strategies include deep breathing exercises or abdominal breathing e.g. Alexander Technique or Pilates courses, relaxation techniques such as yoga or meditation. The Buteyko method, a type of breathing, has had very good results in helping asthma sufferers. An ioniser that

produces negative ions (a running shower can produce these) helps some people too.



Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*

By reducing the body's exposure to allergens and reducing its inflammatory response through diet and herbs, it is possible to make asthma a manageable condition.

Next Time **Eczema**

Spice and Nice

Herbalists use several well known spices as medicines, so by adding spices to your diet you will not only excite your taste buds but do your health a power of good too! (*note that in some of the studies quoted dose levels greatly exceed those in the normal diet and the information is given for interest only as all serious conditions should be treated by medical professionals such as herbalists.*)

Black Pepper contains piperine that helps the body absorb more nutrients from food. Studies show that adding freshly ground black pepper to your meal doubles your intake of nutrients.

Cinnamon relieves flatulence and nausea as well as improving circulation and reducing muscle spasms making it good for period pains and IBS. Cinnamon is very effective in reducing blood sugar levels in type II diabetics and in reducing cholesterol. A good combination when following a cholesterol controlling diet is porridge with cinnamon sprinkled on top.



Cayenne, made from ground chillies, improves the circulation and boosts the immune system, great if you suffer from low blood pressure or cold extremities. Take with ginger as a tea to help get rid of a cold. It also contains salicylates, Nature's pain-killers, hence the study that showed eating a HOT curry helped relieve the pain of a headache.

Nutmeg contains myristin that can give a sense of wellbeing. A pinch of the freshly grated spice is an excellent way to relieve flatulence, nausea and vomiting. Don't just use it on rice pudding and sweet dishes; it tastes great added to mashed swede and other root vegetables.



Turmeric is mild and commonly used to colour Indian dishes. But this amazing spice contains curcumin, a powerful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory on a par with cortisone. It can help reduce joint pain from inflammatory conditions e.g. rheumatoid arthritis. It also boosts the immune system, protects the liver from toxins, reduces blood clotting and helps control cholesterol and blood sugars. It is also anti-tumour with studies showing it shrunk colon polyps, and helped ward off prostate tumours. Research in the US has shown promising results in fighting cancer and Alzheimer's.

Ginger too is anti-inflammatory and an antioxidant. If you suffer from arthritis eat a centimetre of fresh root per day to reduce the pain and swelling. Fresh or dried as a tea, or crystallised sucked, can relieve nausea caused by travel, headaches,

migraines and morning sickness. Laboratory tests indicate it may also prevent cell mutations that lead to cancer. Like garlic, ginger is highly effective in stopping the blood platelets from sticking together and forming blood clots.



So don't reach for the salt, add a spice to food instead. If you like it really spicy, try the recipe below that uses several spices for a real healthy taste explosion!

Spicy Ginger Chicken serves two
 $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp of cayenne pepper or red chilli
 2cm (1 inch) grated fresh ginger root
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp turmeric
 2 cloves of garlic
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoon of lemon juice
 Freshly ground black pepper
 Blend together to make a paste, or finely chop and mix together.

Cut 2 boned, skinless chicken breasts into bite sized pieces and mix together with the blended spices in a bowl and leave to marinate for a few minutes.

Meanwhile, heat some olive oil in a pan, add one finely sliced onion and fry for about 5-6 minutes until the onion is caramelized. Add the marinated chicken and paste and cook for 4-5 minutes until the chicken pieces run with clear juices. Add 100 ml of water and simmer for a few minutes until you have a thick sauce then stir in a handful of chopped coriander leaves. Serve with naan bread or Basmati rice.



NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

New Year, new you and your great plans to give up smoking, diet, cut down on alcohol, detox and exercise more - but cutting out all

your vices at the same time is a recipe for failure! A short, sharp detox might sound like the antidote to the festive over-indulgences but the smart way to a healthier you is making specific, achievable and, most importantly, sustainable changes to your diet and exercise regime with the help of herbs.

There is no such thing as an unhealthy food only an unhealthy diet. So start by keeping a food diary for a week or two recording everything you eat and drink. Ask yourself what triggers your eating; is it hunger, stress or habit? Then set yourself realistic goals and deadlines to improve your health, e.g. 3 nights a week alcohol free, replacing that second cup of morning coffee with redbush or green tea, and having a cuppa without a biscuit! Other good habits to replace old bad ones include:

- eating a healthy breakfast and for cold winter mornings nothing beats porridge
- replacing sugary snacks with a piece of fruit or a handful of seeds and nuts
- having wholegrain bread or rice instead of white.

Include in your diet foods containing vitamins A, C & E which are rich in antioxidants and protect the liver, your detox organ. These include dark green vegetables, peppers, oranges, kiwi fruit and berries. Buy a juicer in the sales as juices provide an excellent source of easily absorbed nutrients.

Milk Thistle *Silybum marianus*

Dieting, especially crash dieting causes muscle loss as the body reverts to starvation mode and actually preserves fat! Therefore aim to lose weight slowly and exercise at the same time to maintain muscle. Gentle exercise over a long period is better than short, high-intensity bursts because, to burn fat, our bodies' needs oxygen. Brisk walking, dancing, resistance training or swimming are ideal.

Your body stores toxins in fat cells. Once you start to burn fat the toxins are released. This is one of the reasons you can feel tired and lethargic on a diet. Your liver and kidneys have to process these toxins and herbs can help support these vital organs. Milk thistle has properties that protect liver cells, can help their regeneration and act as a powerful antioxidant, 200 times more potent than vitamin C & E. Milk thistle has also been shown to have a protective effect on the kidneys. Artichoke extract and Dandelion root both encourage bile flow and, as this is the way the liver eliminates toxins from the body, both these herbs improve the efficiency of that elimination, leaving you feeling better quicker! Oat straw and Chaste Berry help you deal with the withdrawal symptoms from giving up caffeine or nicotine.

So plan your lifestyle changes carefully and here's to a healthy new year! **JULIE**

THIS NEWSETTER IS PUBLISHED 3 TIMES A YEAR SO LOOK OUT FOR THE NEXT EDITION OF HEDGEROW-HERBAL NEWS WHICH WILL BE AVAILABLE FROM MARCH 2009

Visit the Hedgerow Herbals website www.hedgerow-herbals.co.uk.

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