

## Holistic Treatment of Atopic and Non Atopic Respiratory Disorders



It would appear that respiratory disorders are on the increase worldwide. Research has shown that the incidence of asthma and allergy in the UK has almost trebled in the last 20 years, with one in three people likely to develop an allergy at some point in their lives. There is a close link between asthma and allergies, with between 60% and 80% of people with asthma reporting symptoms brought on by their allergies according to the latest figures produced by the Medical Research Council (MRC) and Asthma UK.

Asthma in particular, causes much concern, particularly for parents as it typically presents by repeated attacks of breathing difficulty, often when trying to breath out. It is usually a chronic condition associated with ongoing airway inflammation which can result in recurring acute episodes (attacks) of breathing problems such as coughing, wheezing, chest tightness, and shortness of breath. These symptoms occur because the inflammation makes the airways overreact to a variety of stimuli, or triggers, including physical activity, upper respiratory infections, allergens, and irritants. If an asthma sufferer is exposed to their particular triggers, it creates more swelling which can cause partial blocking of the airways. Asthma 'attacks' can be mild, moderate, or even life-threatening and they often occur at night (nocturnal asthma) in as many as 75% of sufferers.

### The Allergic Process

The allergic process, called *atopy*, involves various airborne allergens or other triggers that set off a cascade of events in the immune system leading to inflammation and hyper-reactivity in the airways. This is referred to as atopic or extrinsic asthma. There appears to be two specific responses to the environmental triggers;

- *The Hyper-reactive response*-The smooth muscles of the airways and lungs constrict in response to inhaled allergens or irritants. Asthma sufferers tend to overreact or hyper respond to the inhaled triggers. Smooth muscles in the airways of people with asthma may have a defect, perhaps a deficiency in a critical chemical that prevents the muscles from relaxing
- *The Inflammatory response*-In response to allergens or other environmental triggers, the immune system delivers white blood cells and other immune factors to the airways. These so-called inflammatory factors cause the airways to swell, to fill with fluid, and to produce a thick sticky mucus. This combination of events results in wheezing, breathlessness, inability to exhale properly, and a phlegm-producing cough

Some people with asthma appear to have no clear allergies. The term *non atopic* or *intrinsic asthma* refers to this type. Other atopic conditions include conditions such as hay fever, asthma and allergic eczema.

### The Herbalists Approach

A Herbal approach is not to treat a 'disease' but to help the body to heal itself by identifying a person's constitutional needs and using carefully chosen herbs and nutritional advice to help to initiate the body's own healing processes. However, certain herbs have an affinity to tissues and organs and appropriate herbal medication can be used to dramatically reduce the symptoms of atopic conditions while other herbs work at a deeper level to help rebalance the constitution. For this reason a chronic condition may take a few months or even a year to correct itself. During this time, if a person already uses inhalers or other medication, herbs can be used in conjunction. In this instance, it would be advisable for the Herbalist and GP to be in communication.

Symptoms of allergy such as runny nose, red itchy eyes, itchiness, sneezing, and congestion are familiar to us in conditions such as hay fever, asthma and allergic eczema. Allergic responses are very complex and involve many inflammatory substances such as histamine, mast cells (basophils), eosinophils, cytokines, and IgE antibodies amongst others. Some people are born with high levels of IgE antibodies and mast cells making them more susceptible and we can acquire allergies at any stage of life. Conventional treatment of allergies either blocks the immune response (anti-histamines), or in more severe cases, seeks to suppress immune function with steroids, applied internally and externally. Herbs can be used to treat chronic allergies; giving relief for symptoms, sparing the adrenal lands (often exhausted in long-term allergy sufferers), and balancing the immune system.



*Tussilago farfara*

Coltsfoot

Helps to relax the bronchi and expel mucus

Clinical studies have shown that herbal products are effective in treating allergies and asthma. The herbal approach is broad based and multi-factorial to match the many layers and wide distribution that is characteristic of autoimmune conditions. Herbal medicines are effective in relieving symptoms, reducing inflammation, repairing tissue damage, improving our ability to adapt to stress, improving mood, and at the same time encouraging the body to overthrow the initial cause of the condition.

Herbs are used to strengthen the affected tissues and provide the conditions to neutralise an infection. This serves to halt the cycle of inflammation and tissue damage triggered by the original causative factors.

Herbs with their innately complex yet sensitive intelligence intervene in the inflammatory cascades reducing heat and therefore pain, balancing fluid metabolism, and helping restore function. NIMH 2008.

### The Holistic Approach

Treatment by a herbalist relies on a holistic approach. This means that the disease isn't treated, but the person who has the disease. Herbal medicines would be prescribed depending on the constitution of the person and how the disease is affecting them. For example, in some people, hayfever may present with a dry cough, dry irritated nasal passages with a tendency to headaches and inability to sleep. In others it would involve red, burning eyes, nasal inflammation with a runny nose and eyes, or they may suffer excess phlegm, congested sinuses and feel heavy and lethargic. These are all symptoms of hayfever, but they may be experienced differently from one person to another. This is why a herbalist may use a completely different prescription for each person presenting with the same disease.



*Euphrasia officinalis*

Eyebright-Soothes irritated mucous membranes. It has anti-inflammatory and antihistamine properties. It is often used in combination with other herbs to alleviate the severity of allergic respiratory conditions. It may be used in an infusion to bathe the eyes, as a gargle for sore throats, or as a tea to relieve symptoms of inflammation



*Boswellia serrata/ carterii*

Franincense Has been found to inhibit the allergic reaction response in asthma. Franincense also helps to relax and deepen breathing



*Lobelia inflata* Lobelia. A schedule 3 herb (Available by Practitioner's prescription only), which has the powerful effect of reducing the spasm of the bronchi allowing the airways to relax and dilate. It is also a mild sedative and pain reliever. The use of lobelia is carefully calculated by the herbal practitioner for its efficacy and should never be prescribed by anyone other than a fully qualified medical herbalist.

### Bibliography

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Cost for initial consultation will be £35 (1 hour), or approximately £55 including medicines

Follow-up consultations will be £20 (1/2 hour), or approximately £38 including medicines.

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**Please make sure you contact a registered Medical Herbalist before taking any Herbal Preparations. The use of inappropriate Herbal preparation may be ineffective or at worse, could be harmful to your health.**

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