

ASTHMA

DR. ALEC BURTON, N.D., D.O.

The respiratory system is concerned with the processes by which the body takes up oxygen from the air and eliminates gaseous wastes. Respiration is essential to life, we can live many weeks without food, several days without water, but any attempt to live without air (oxygen) for more than a few minutes would almost certainly fail. We are not normally aware of the process of breathing, although it can quite easily be brought under conscious control; the mechanism of respiration is under the direction of a centre in the lower part of the brain known as the respiratory centre, this centre is, in turn, under the control of the cerebrum.

In view of the importance of respiration for the continuance of vital processes it is not surprising that any disorder arising within this system causes anxiety and apprehension.

Asthma is a most distressing disease which is characterized by a difficulty in expiration, it is a paroxysmal affection of the bronchial passages giving rise to dyspnoea (difficult breathing); there is a swelling of the delicate mucous membranes together with inflammation; asthma is said to be of an "allergic nature".

Allergy originally meant "an altered reaction to protein" and is similar to anaphylaxis "an increased sensitivity to a foreign protein", but it now refers to reactions to other substances than proteins and may be refined as a "violent reaction of the body to a foreign substance".

It is rather futile and time wasting to give attention to the "allergy", that is not the disease, it is only the result of hypersensitivity and as Dr. Shelton has pointed out, "It is obvious, however, that the removal of the allergin, which is the occasion for the allergic phenomena, and not the cause of the hypersensitivity, does not remove the hypersensitivity, hence genuine health is not restored." Our aim, therefore, is to improve the health generally thus enabling the sufferer to overcome the susceptibility to the offending substance.

Asthma has a catarrhal background and to further complicate this it is intimately connected with the emotional life of the individual. It is difficult to know where the physiological reasons for the disease terminate and the psychological commences. That is why in cases of asthma psychologists can claim as much success as physicians in the actual treatment. However, to achieve a satisfactory result both physical and mental aspects must be studied.

The symptoms of asthma are only too familiar to the sufferer, the suddenness of the attack, which usually occurs in the early hours of the morning, the fear and anxiety engendered by the peculiar tightness and immobility of the chest, the alarming difficulty of expiration which may be preceded by a bout of sneezing or coughing. The successful, though difficult, accomplishment of respiration produces a characteristic wheezing sound always associated with the asthmatic condition. Every effort is made to prevent suffocation by sitting up with the shoulders raised and the head tossed back, a desperate attempt to fill the lungs with air and expel it with similar ease.

The paroxysm may last for several hours or, in some milder cases, only a few minutes. In the more stubborn cases where there are frequent attacks emphysema may result. In emphysema there is an increased distension of the alveoli (air sacs) of the lungs. The abnormal distension may be so great, in certain cases, resulting in destruction of large areas of the lung surface owing to the formation of large sacs which arise from the rupturing of the walls of some of the adjacent air vesicles, that permanent damage to the lung structures may occur.

To the practitioner the asthmatic presents a complicated problem and a measure of re-adjustment is required; the emotional factors involved providing a predisposition to the "attacks", must be sought and removed. In disease there can be no cure without removal of cause, and there are usually many causes. To treat the sick without giving attention to causes is quackery no matter how impressive the results of such treatment may appear to be. If the cause remains so does

the disease, even if it is not evident all the time; it may be efficiently suppressed, temporarily, but always it reappears, usually in a more severe form with a fresh set of symptoms, this of course, is accepted as a "different" disease with no relation to the earlier disorders, but be not deceived, Nature is not mocked.

The removal of causes can only be achieved through self effort, no one else can do this for you, whether they are psychological or physical. A practitioner can only aid, he cannot remedy. Commonly the asthmatic is a youngest or eldest child who bears some intense resentment towards an elder person who has attempted to dominate him; however, this is not always the case and each patient must receive special individual attention. It has been proved repeatedly that every thought and emotion has a definite effect upon the physical constituents of the organism. Mental and emotional conditions positively and decidedly affect the chemical composition of the tissues, structures and secretions of the body. Any psychological factor then, bitterness, envy, hatred, or resentment must be eradicated first, results will be disappointing otherwise.

All debilitating habits must be discontinued immediately, we must live sensibly to live healthily. Excesses of all kinds, over-stimulation, drugs, alcohol and tobacco are all conducive to enervation and lowered vitality is a primary cause of disease.

It is deemed necessary to stress the fact at the outset that any "treatment" must be kept up all the time, it is of no value if it is only employed subsequent to each "attack" and then discontinued until the next bout incites a little more enthusiasm. In this way no progress will be made; the effort must be sustained to be successful.

Furthermore, in a chronic case of asthma we do not anticipate any apparent "miracles", the improvement will be slow and steady, there may be occasions, when the sufferer is subjected to some shock or emotional strain, when the symptoms may be slightly aggravated and this will, normally, be discouraging but when the exciting cause of the unexpected "flare up" has been recognized any anxiety will be dispelled.

Whilst the paroxysms are distressing, as the health improves their frequency and severity will diminish until finally to further symptoms will assert themselves.

Owing to the chronic catarrhal background of asthma the dietetic measures enforced must be fairly drastic. A short fast of two to three days with nothing but diluted fruit juice or water as liquid, will assist in the establishment of natural hunger. Following this we recommend a further day on raw fruit alone and then the commencement of a balanced diet. We suggest three meals a day, one of fruit only, one of conservatively cooked vegetables and finally one of raw salad vegetables; this should be strictly adhered to for one week then small amounts of other foodstuffs may be included. A glass of milk with the fruit, some protein (egg, cheese or fish), with the cooked vegetables and the addition of some starchy food such as wholemeal bread or potato (in jacket) may be added to the salad meal. It is desirable to repeat the restricted diet at intervals of six to eight weeks. Always masticate your food thoroughly, and it is a wise plan to leave the table with the thought "I could have eaten more"—simply—do not overeat.

Fruit and vegetable juices are the ideal drink and such beverages as tea and coffee should be obediently avoided.

It is remarkable what can be done to benefit health with just two simple things, a coarse towel and a little cold water. A cold water friction rub every day is an essential to health improvement, and for its beneficial effect upon the circulatory and nervous systems it cannot be omitted from the daily habits of the asthmatic. Soak the towel in the cold water and lightly wring it out then, starting at the feet, scrub every part of the body vigorously with the towel, then dry quickly. The effect will be remarkably stimulating and the feeling on completion should be one of increased vitality and exhilaration. A word of caution may be appropriate however. Care must be taken not to become chilled. The atmosphere should be pleasantly warm and on no account should cold water be applied to the body when it is in a chilled condition.

To the asthma patient breathing exercises are of supreme

importance and should be practised as frequently as possible, preferably out of doors, but any exercise is better than no exercise. In breathing the persistence should be placed on achieving efficient and complete expiration—without placing any undue strain upon the respiratory organs.

Breathing exercises and also other physical exercises should be practised with a definite objective. Their effectiveness depends largely upon the mental attitude during practice, every movement, every single motion should be accompanied by a conscious effort to make it produce certain results, the key is attention. Exercises should never be performed as just a boring but necessary routine, exercise performed with such an attitude of mind will be of little value.

The best form of exercise for the asthmatic is walking. Long walks in the country are the most desirable and health promoting and every opportunity of getting away from the usual environment should be welcomed.

If these principles are carefully followed and introduced into the life of the asthma sufferer nothing but beneficial and rewarding results will ensue. But, as James C. Thomson has repeatedly pointed out; "Any cure to be lasting must be kept up all the time."

Many people have been cured of asthma with Homœopathic remedies but often deep constitutional treatment is necessary and this should be given by a skilled Homœopath. However, the following remedies have proved useful in many cases and should be given when symptoms match those of the patient.

Antimonium tartaricum. Frequent fits of obstructed respiration especially in the evening or in the morning in bed, almost to the extent of suffocation. Shortness of breath; rattling of mucus in chest when breathing. Worse at night and from cold and damp.

Dose: Two pills of *Ant. tart.* 6 every two hours until symptoms improve.

Arsenicum album. Shortness of breath, difficulty of respiration, choking, etc., worse evening in bed or at night when lying down. Constriction and oppression of chest with great anxiety and restlessness. Burning sensation better by warmth.

Dose : Two pills of *Ars. alb.* 6 every two hours until symptoms improve.

Cuprum metallicum. Asthma when ascending or walking quickly, with necessity to breathe deeply. Fits of suffocation. Painful contraction of chest after drinking.

Dose : Two pills of *Cup. met.* 6 every two hours until symptoms improve.

Ipecacuanha. Violent degree of shortness of breath with wheezing and great weight and anxiety about the chest and heart region. Threatened suffocation from accumulation of mucus. There is usually nausea when this remedy is needed. Shortness of breath on the least movement.

Dose : Two pills of *Ipecac.* 6 every two hours until symptoms improve.

Natrum Sulph. This remedy is useful when every fresh cold starts an attack of asthma and should be thought of when asthmatical attacks frequently occur in the early hours of the morning. Shortness of breath especially when walking. All symptoms are worse in damp humid weather.

Dose : Two pills of *Nat. Sulph.* 6 every two hours until symptoms improve.

Nux vomica. Difficult respiration and shortness of breath ; constriction and oppression of chest worse at night or in morning. Heavy pressing pain in chest as from a heavy load. The patient needing this remedy would feel chilly and be very irritable.

Dose : Two pills of *Nux vom.* 6 every two hours until symptoms improve.

When the patient is improving do not give any more medicine but let it work out and only repeat when the same symptoms are returning.

Should new ones appear then another remedy must be selected.

—*Health & You, Sept., 1956*