

# Better Breathing for a Healthier Life

## An Osteopathic Approach to the Treatment Asthma

Australia has one of the highest rates of asthma in the world and is on the rise, with around 16-20%<sup>(1,2)</sup> of children suffering from it now compared with less than 10% in the early 1980's. Asthma is one of the most common problems managed by doctors and is a frequent reason for the hospitalization of children. Most children diagnosed subsequently need to use Ventolin and preventative medication to combat this disabling disease, but there is more that can be done. Recent research<sup>(3,4)</sup> shows that if asthmatics are also treated with osteopathy, these patients sustain an increase in both lung function and quality of life.

### A Typical Case

Eight year old Alana had been diagnosed with asthma when she was five. She was having difficulty keeping up with her classmates in the playground and was using her Ventolin puffer three times a day while also taking preventative medication daily. One particularly severe attack induced by playing sport had led to Alana being hospitalized. Wanting better management of her condition, Alana's parents tried osteopathy in the hope that Alana could lead a more active and stress free life.

During a detailed history taking and examination, the osteopath found that Alana's central nervous system was over stressed and her nose, throat and chest region were not moving efficiently leading to poor breathing even when Alana was not having an attack. After four treatments Alana's Ventolin use had decreased to just once a day and with a subsequent two treatments she only used it during sport.

Brisbane Osteopath Rebecca Reed-Baxter explains "Asthma attacks have many different triggers and osteopaths aim to treat the various systems of the body to increase the body's resistance to these triggers and decrease the severity of attacks."

### Osteopathic Treatment for Asthma

Most asthma sufferers have a poor range of motion in the ribs and spine which lead to a decrease in the expansion of the chest cavity, an increase in the tension of the breathing muscles and impaired lymphatic drainage. During an attack the airways constrict and produce fluid.

Due to the poor lymphatic drainage this fluid is unable to be removed efficiently and the breathing muscles are put under more strain.

Most asthmatics also have an imbalance in their autonomic nervous system, which increases the viscosity of the fluid secretions and further decreases the diameter of the airways and the amount of blood flow to the lungs. This leads to more severe attacks.

By treating the musculoskeletal restrictions, osteopaths are able to have a direct influence on lung function and the autonomic nervous system which helps to decrease the severity of attacks. Osteopaths also look at the patient holistically. To increase the body's tolerance of the triggers for asthma, osteopaths treat other seemingly unrelated stresses and strains within the body which help to calm the central nervous system and other organs in the body.

### Osteopathy and Pharmaceuticals – A Combined Approach

Pharmaceuticals such as Ventolin and preventative puffers are able to help Asthma sufferers by increasing the diameter of the airways. Osteopathy is able to improve the function of the ribs and breathing muscles leading to improved lung function, and balance the autonomic nervous system thus decreasing the severity of attacks. By treating the body holistically the tolerance of triggers is increased which leads to less frequent attacks. When used as a combined approach asthma sufferers find they use less medication and are able to lead more active and stress free lives.

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