

Papworth breathing technique cuts asthma symptoms by a third

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A sequence of breathing and relaxation exercises known as the Papworth method has been shown to reduce asthma symptoms by a third by the first randomised controlled trial to investigate the technique, which is published online ahead of print in Thorax.

Eighty five people with mild asthma were randomly assigned to receive either five sessions of treatment by the Papworth method on top of their medical care or to continue to rely on usual drug therapy.

After the sessions had finished, patients' asthma symptoms were assessed using the St George's Respiratory Symptom Questionnaire. Patients who had been treated by the Papworth method scored an average of 21.8 on the questionnaire compared with an average score of 32.8 for patients who had not received the treatment.

And this improvement in symptoms was still maintained one year later. At 12 months patients who had been treated using the Papworth method scored 24.9, while patients who had not scored 33.5.

Use of the Papworth method was associated with less depression and anxiety, and symptoms from inappropriate breathing habits were also reduced. The technique improved the relaxed breathing rate but there was no significant improvement in specific measures of lung function.

The authors say: 'To our knowledge, this is the first evidence from a controlled trial to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Papworth

method.

‘The fact that no significant change was observed in objective measures of lung function suggests that five treatments of the Papworth method do not improve the chronic underlying physiological causes of asthma, but rather their manifestation.’

The Papworth method of physical therapy is a series of integrated breathing and relaxation exercises developed in the 1960s. The breathing training involves a specific diaphragmatic breathing technique, emphasises nose breathing and development of a breathing pattern to suit current activity. It is accompanied by relaxation training and education to help people integrate the exercises into their daily lives and recognise the early signs of stress.

Source: BMJ Specialty Journals

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