

Dysfunctional breathing often wrongly thought to be asthma

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Many people with breathing difficulties remain undiagnosed or are diagnosed wrongly as having asthma when the problem might actually be dysfunctional breathing (DB). Information and breathing exercises can help these patients. This is the subject of a new doctoral thesis by Carina Hagman, a registered physical therapist at the hospital Falu lasarett and a doctoral student at Uppsala University.

The term dysfunctional breathing (DB) describes a disorder suffered by people whose breathing pattern comes from high up in the chest even while resting. People with DB have chronic or recurrent [breathing difficulties](#) which cannot be ascribed to a medical diagnosis such as asthma or chronic [obstructive lung disease](#). Previous studies have estimated that around 10 percent of the adult population has dysfunctional breathing and that it is more common with women and people who have asthma.

'Researchers have not yet agreed upon a definition, diagnosis criteria or treatment for DB. It's an important area to study since the condition seems to be widespread and so far not much research has been done and not much is known about it', says Carina Hagman.

According to Carina Hagman, it is important to keep DB in mind when providing everyday treatment for patients with non-specific breathing difficulties. This is so that the correct diagnosis can be made and appropriate treatment prescribed.

'DB symptoms can be misinterpreted as asthma symptoms and patients with DB can be wrongly diagnosed as having asthma which in turn can lead to patients being given unnecessary asthma medication,' says Carina Hagman.

Her thesis is based on the Respiratory Movement Measuring Instrument which objectively measures breathing movements. The instrument was first used to test healthy people to see if it could measure different kinds of [breathing patterns](#) in various body positions and whether the breathing movements so measured were related to breath volumes. The instrument was then used in a study for objectively measuring and evaluating breathing movements before and after patients with DB had been treated. Their treatment consisted of information and breathing exercises.

'Some of the patients had suffered from breathing difficulties for many years and had sought medical attention before being diagnosed. Many of these were wrongly diagnosed with asthma and were taking asthma medication even though they didn't have asthma. The treatment results indicate that information and [breathing exercises](#) are good for patients with dysfunctional breathing. They have fewer symptoms, make fewer emergency visits to the hospital and there are fewer things they can't do – all of which improves their daily lives. They also achieve better [breathing](#) patterns and their improved health gives them a better quality of life as was shown by the long-term follow-up study', says Carina Hagman.

More information: Dysfunctional breathing: Clinical characteristics and treatment:

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