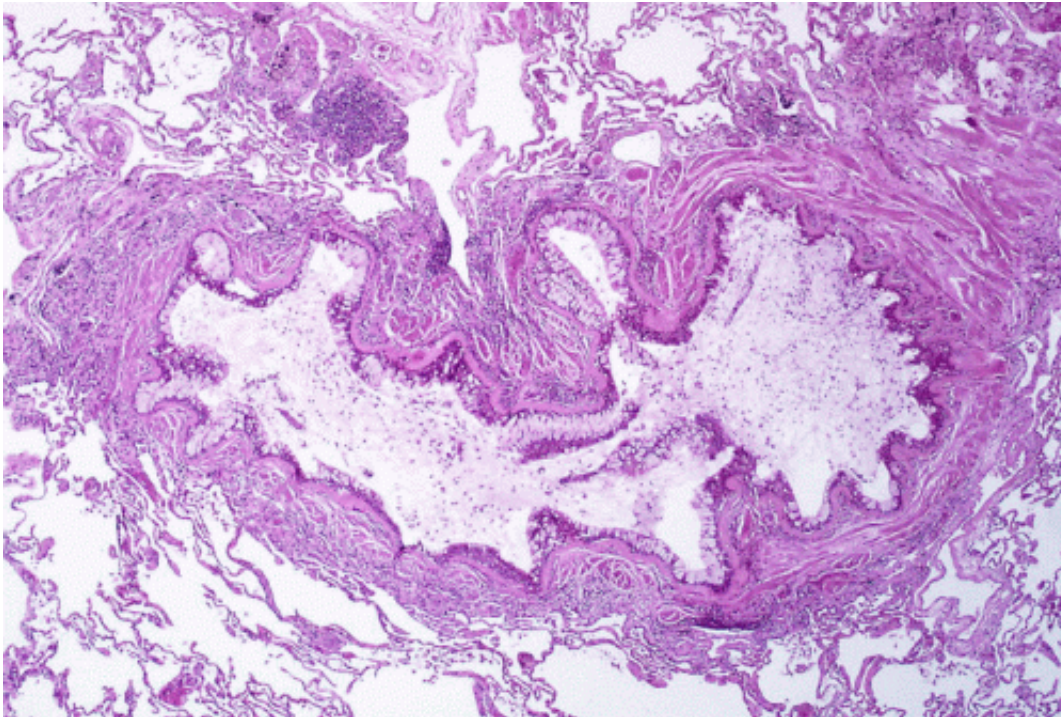


Peer-led self-management programs may not help teenagers with asthma

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Obstruction of the lumen of a bronchiole by mucoid exudate, goblet cell metaplasia, and epithelial basement membrane thickening in a person with asthma. Credit: Yale Rosen/Wikipedia/CC BY-SA 2.0

A study from the University of Warwick suggests peer-led self-management programmes have little impact on the quality of life or lung function of adolescents with asthma.

Peer-led self-management programmes differ from typical patient education in that they encourage patients to take an active role in managing their condition. While traditional self-management programmes are taught by professionals, new programmes are taught by "peers"—people of equal standing who belong to the same societal group.

Asthma is a leading chronic condition in adolescents and unlike children or adults, young people face distinct challenges because of puberty, peer pressure, psychosocial development, and healthcare transition. Dr GJ Melendez-Torres who led the study said: "Asthma symptoms can be exacerbated by hormonal changes and new exposures, such as cigarettes and drugs. In addition, adolescents often experience fear, anxiety, and shame about their illness, and may not take their medication as prescribed to fit in with their peers

"As a result, young people aged 11-17 have double the risk of dying from asthma than children aged 10 and under, and a greater risk of psychosocial problems than those without. These unique challenges and consequences require new approaches to address these adolescents' concerns."

Researchers retrieved 1,887 articles and found four studies that met their inclusion criteria. They found a small, statistically non-significant increase in participants' quality of life, and a small, statistically non-significant decrease in [lung function](#). In one randomised controlled trial interventions reduced [asthma symptoms](#) and improved self-management. However overall, a lack of data made meta-analysis unfeasible, and studies had unclear or high risk of bias.

In the United States peer-led management is a critical component of their National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's National Asthma Education and Prevention Program (NAEPP) asthma guidelines. These

programmes use organised learning to facilitate healthy behaviours, such as treatment adherence and dealing with emotions. The use of peers has several advantages such as providing role models, interpreting health advice in a relevant manner to adolescents, cutting the cost of staff budgets and benefiting the educators themselves.

Sixteen databases were searched in May 2015 for published and unpublished studies. Studies had to be randomised controlled trials (RCTs); they had to include participants aged 10-19 years old with asthma; use a peer-led educational intervention that addressed self-management of [asthma](#); and report a measure of health status or behaviour as an outcome. Trial quality and data extraction were based on pre-specified criteria. Results were pooled using a random-effects model with mean differences.

Co-author Connie Zhong, of Harvard Medical School added: "According to social learning theory, young people are more likely to have positive attitudes towards modelled behaviours if they can relate to their teachers. By interacting with educators of similar age and backgrounds, adolescents can seek guidance and increase their self-efficacy to achieve health behaviour change. Also role models provide a means for peer identification, which reduces feelings of isolation and increases feelings of normalcy. By normalising health behaviours, [adolescents](#) may better adhere to treatments, leading to improved health."

More information: Connie S Zhong et al, The effect of peer-led self-management education programmes for adolescents with asthma: A systematic review and meta-analysis, *Health Education Journal* (2017). [DOI: 10.1177/0017896917712297](https://doi.org/10.1177/0017896917712297)

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