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## Asthma: Does breathing training help?



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## **Training in breathing techniques could help people relax. Whether it can also relieve asthma is still not quite clear.**

The airways of people who have asthma are more sensitive than those of healthy people. They over-react to certain external factors and irritants. When someone has an asthma attack, the muscles around their airways squeeze, and the membranes lining their lungs become swollen and produce more mucus. As a result, their airways become narrow and it is a little harder to breathe. Asthma is often closely associated with an allergy.

There are a lot of different breathing exercises and techniques for people with asthma. They aim to have a relaxing and calming effect, as well as help people to breathe in a calm and controlled way during an attack. Breathing training is a traditional technique for promoting relaxation and better concentration. Yoga is a particularly popular option in Germany. The Buteyko method and physiotherapeutic breathing techniques are used in asthma too.

Yoga is an old practice that originated in India, involving body and breathing exercises. In yoga breathing exercises, you are taught to breathe consciously and observe your body closely at the same time. The Buteyko method is another approach that aims to help you control your breathing with the help of certain breathing techniques. The main idea behind it is to breathe in and out less frequently, but more effectively.

Physiotherapeutic breathing techniques involve various exercises, including breathing exercises and the use of devices too.

But it takes time to learn one of these techniques, and they then need to be practised regularly. That raises the question of whether or not any benefit justifies the effort.

### **What researchers found**

In order to answer this question, researchers from the Cochrane Collaboration looked for good enough trials, in which people with asthma tested out the various forms of breathing training, such as yoga breathing exercises and Buteyko. The search did not produce a lot of results. There are a lot of studies of breathing techniques, but only a few concentrate on people with asthma. In 2003 they found seven trials on this topic, involving less than 400 people with asthma. A later search in 2009 produced six more trials, involving a total of 600 participants.

The researchers concluded that breathing training could possibly help people with mild or moderate asthma when they have breathing difficulties. Although the training does not have a direct impact on the cause of asthma itself, it could possibly improve people's overall wellbeing and help them to relax.

These questions can only be answered properly with better trials though. The analysis was also made more difficult by the fact that many different breathing techniques were tested in the trials, and it is not always easy to compare them. As long as there are no clearer conclusions, the best approach may be to try out breathing techniques and see for yourself whether they help you.

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## Glossary

### Cochrane Collaboration

The Cochrane Collaboration is an international network of thousands of researchers and others. They work together in teams called Cochrane Review Groups to answer questions about health care by doing systematic reviews of evidence. To achieve this, the members of the Collaboration have developed systems and methods for systematically finding and analysing the results of trials of health care interventions. The goal of the Cochrane Collaboration is to help patients, health care practitioners and others make more informed decisions about health care. You can read more about the Cochrane Collaboration at their website.

### allergy

An allergy is the body's overly sensitive reaction to a foreign substance. The body produces antibodies just as it would if the substance were a germ, although it is not dangerous to the body. The symptoms of the allergy partly depend on the substance causing it, the allergen. People with allergies often have symptoms like running nose, watery eyes, itching, rashes, stomach and bowel problems or asthma. Typical allergens are pollen, animal hair, proteins in certain food or house dust mite excrement.

### asthma

Asthma (asthma bronchiale) is a permanent (chronic) disease with symptoms like coughing and breathlessness often occurring in acute attacks. In asthma, the airways are overly sensitive. The development of asthma is often associated with an overreaction to foreign substances or physical stimuli, frequently in connection with an allergy.

## Sources

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The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG) was established by legislation to provide evaluations of the effectiveness, quality and efficiency of healthcare services. This includes the assessment of medicines as well as the publication of health information for consumers and patients.

## **Evidence basis of our health information**

Our information is based primarily on systematic reviews of the effects of health care. Systematic reviews are necessary to gain an objective picture of health care. In order to do this, a clear question is formulated. Researchers then find all the relevant studies that could answer this question. They then evaluate those studies.

You can find a list of the evidence and other scientific literature on which this information is based at [\*\*www.informedhealthonline.org\*\*](http://www.informedhealthonline.org)

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