

Asthma Prevention Through Nutritional Considerations

The prevalence of asthma in the United States and other westernized countries has increased significantly over the last 40 years. The chronic lung disease inflames and narrows the airways and causes recurring periods of wheezing, chest tightness, shortness of breath, and coughing. Out of the 25 million Americans with asthma, 9 million are children.

Asthma is divided into two types: allergic (extrinsic) and non-allergic (intrinsic). Allergic asthma is the most common form, affecting over 50% of all asthma sufferers. The specific mechanism which causes symptoms of allergic asthma involves IgE antibodies and the release of histamine and other inflammatory substances.

Genetics certainly plays a role in the development of asthma; however, our gene pool has not changed at the rate to which asthma prevalence has increased. There is another factor at play.

Strong epidemiologic data demonstrates an association between dietary deficiencies (omega 3, vitamin C, magnesium, selenium, Vitamin E) and asthma. Conversely, populations with higher intake of pro-inflammatory polyunsaturated fatty acids (omega-6 fatty acids) have a higher prevalence of asthma. The typical American diet tends to contain 14 - 25 times more omega-6 fatty acids than omega-3 fatty acids. Therefore, the best asthma prevention strategy is to ensure proper intake of the above mentioned vitamins and minerals and to balance dietary intake of omega 3 and omega 6 fatty acids.

Vegetable oil consumption rose dramatically between the beginning and end of the 20th century, and this had an entirely predictable effect on the ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 fats in the American diet. The following oils have high omega 6 content: safflower, sunflower, corn, cottonseed, sesame, peanut, soybean, and canola. Soybean oil alone is now so ubiquitous in fast foods and processed foods that an astounding 20 percent of the calories in the American diet are estimated to come from this single source.

Increasing omega 3 intake can be accomplished by incorporating some of the following foods into your diet: wild caught seafood, flax seeds, chia seeds, hemp seeds. Some lesser known sources of omega 3 fatty acids are brussel sprouts and cauliflower.

References

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

<http://www.aafa.org>

University of Maryland Medical Center.

<http://umm.edu/health/medical/altmed/supplement/omega6-fatty-acids#ixzz2bJBnVkt9>