

# Massage Can Help Asthmatics Breathe Easier.

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**In a worst case scenario, normally fit and healthy people could probably live for about a month without any food, or without water for about a week.**

But we can't live without oxygen - or, more precisely, the exchange of gases by inhaling oxygen and exhaling carbon dioxide - for more than a few minutes.

Every cell, organ and system in the body needs oxygen to carry out their functions. That makes the normal, automatic process of breathing about the most important aspect of our everyday lives.

But because it's automatic, breathing is taken for granted - except, of course, when there is a problem like asthma or other respiratory ailment.

## **Improve Breathing.**

The potential to significantly improve breathing efficiency - and therefore our overall health - is perhaps the most overlooked or least known benefit of deep tissue remedial massage. People normally just associate this type of

massage with fixing tight or sore muscles and joints - usually in back, shoulder, neck, legs and arms.

But what most people don't realise is how much better they can feel if they also have remedial massage for the entire suite of breathing muscles.

This doesn't only apply to asthmatics, but to **anyone** ... elite athletes, sport and exercise enthusiasts, and anyone who works for a living, raises a family or is subjected to stress.

Respiratory complications can arise from a variety of neuro-muscular and skeletal disorders as well as obstructive and restrictive diseases.

The fact that breathing can be altered by changes in posture/position, emotional state, activity level, diseases and even tight garments means there are numerous influences on respiration - so a variety of treatments and not just medication should be considered when there are problems.

## **Asthma Treatment.**

As a remedial masseur, I find it amazing that medical practitioners don't automatically recommend remedial massage as part of treatment for asthma.

Asthma can be triggered by any number of factors, like allergies, weather changes, stress, hormonal imbalances, postural/muscular problems, nerve impingements, etc. But no-one can dispute that asthma is a breathing difficulty and muscles always play a major role in the breathing process.

There are over 14 individual and groups of muscles involved in inhaling and exhaling. Inhaling muscles elevate and expand the ribcage for breathing in and exhaling muscles depress and contract the ribs for breathing out.

These muscles range from the neck to the lower back, and include along the spine, in the chest, stomach, top of hips and along the sides of the torso.

If any of these muscles are too tight or inflexible, they could prevent you either inhaling or exhaling a full breath. Breathing difficulties - in or out - can cause the body to become toxic, sluggish and incapable of healing.

Ask any asthmatic what they experience in an "attack" and they'll not only mention difficulty breathing, plus coughing and wheezing, but also how tight and painful their chest and even lower back muscles feel before, during and after an attack.

Asthma attacks occur when spasms of the smooth muscles lining the walls of the bronchi and bronchioles (larger and smaller branches of the windpipe going to various segments of the lungs) cause the passageways to partially close.

Massage therapists can usually open these passages simply by relaxing the muscles in the bronchi by working on any of a range of

acupressure points in the chest, back or even the hands.

But the incidence and/or severity of asthma attacks also may be significantly reduced if all the muscles associated with breathing and others influencing posture are kept as loose and flexible as possible.

If you're a fitness enthusiast, you will recognise some of the names of muscles associated with breathing and realise you're exercising them regularly.

So next time you visit the gym or do an aerobics or PT session, think about how exercising these muscles could be influencing your breathing.

On one hand, they should be generally improving it by increasing stamina and lung capacity. But they can also restrict inhalation or exhalation in some way if any of the muscles become too tight or inflexible from over-exercise or insufficient stretching.

And don't forget that poor posture caused by a range of tight muscles - often caused by your fitness program - can adversely influence your breathing efficiency, and therefore your whole well-being.

### **Breathing Muscles.**

Primary inspiratory muscles include the external intercostals and diaphragm while the main expiratory muscles are the internal intercostals, rectus abdominus ("abs"), and external and internal obliques.

Assisting the inspiratory muscles are the sternocleidomastoid and scalenes in the neck, pectoralis major and minor ("pecs") in the chest, and serratus anterior and latissimus dorsi ("lats") in the side of the torso.

Helping to breathe out are the serratus posterior as well as the quadratus lumborum and iliocostalis lumborum in the back.

All these muscles, specifically or indirectly, are part of any normal training program at a gym or PT session. They can and often do become very tight without you realising it.

Many respiratory muscles also act as "postural" muscles - designed to hold your body erect against gravity and hold a contraction for a long time without fatiguing or feeling sore.

But while there may be no pain, these muscles may still be too tight and affecting other muscles. Proper use of the respiratory muscles is only possible with good posture. If there is a tendency to shrink forward, it is not possible to completely fill the lungs with fresh air.

If the lower back tends to curve inwards, it is not possible to effectively empty the lungs of air. When postural problems limit trunk (spinal) rotation and side-bending, both inspiration and expiration become restricted also.

Are you getting the message yet about the important role remedial massage can play in helping you breathe easier and feel much better overall by releasing and stretching tight muscles all through the body?

### **Massage Helps.**

And did you know that sharp pain felt in the chest or upper back during deep respiration is most often vertebrogenic in origin and is due to tension in the deep muscles of the back? Again, deep tissue massage will help.

Relaxation - mental and physical - brings about a decrease in oxygen consumption by skeletal muscles and more compliance of the chest wall.

Massage and practising a pattern of deep breaths and sighing can reduce the work of breathing and help relax a person having difficulty breathing. When you breathe easier, you will also sleep easier and more soundly.

Try a massage which includes all the breathing muscles and see how much better you feel.

Our therapists are only a phone call away.