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## **Breathing Exercises Help Reduce the Use of Asthma Medications**

Results from a study of breathing exercises for asthma show a marked reduction in the use of medication and an overall improvement in the management of asthma symptoms.

Conducted by researchers and doctors at Sydney's Woolcock Institute of Medical Research and the Alfred Hospital in Melbourne, the study results will be presented for the first time at the Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand (TSANZ) conference in Perth on the 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2005.

The study compared the effects on asthma of two different breathing exercises – one with shallow nose breathing and the other with general upper body and chest exercises.

The object of the study was to monitor the effect of breathing exercises on a person's lung function, asthma symptoms, use of medication and quality of life.

Dr Christine Jenkins, Head of Asthma Research, Woolcock Institute of Medical Research and CRC Project Leader said, "This research study has shown that breathing exercises are effective in reducing asthma symptoms, and can be used to complement current asthma preventer medications."

"Inhaled corticosteroid dose was approximately halved for all patients in this study, compared with doses at entry. However, there was no difference in the extent to which medication could be reduced by patients using two completely different breathing exercises," Dr Jenkins added.

In both groups of volunteers, asthma control (using the Asthma Control Questionnaire) was significantly improved even when the dose of inhaled corticosteroid had been reduced.

The reason why these breathing techniques were successful is probably multifactorial including:

- Volunteers felt comfortable using a non-drug method that was supported by health professionals
- Volunteers were given an alternative strategy to use when they developed asthma symptoms, rather than immediately needing to use reliever medication
- Continued use of the exercises was reinforced by patients experiencing the benefits for themselves.

Volunteers were given a video from which to learn their allocated breathing exercises. They were asked to practice the exercises for 20 minutes each day and to use them for the relief of symptoms. If unsuccessful, reliever medication was to be used. Volunteers were required to answer daily questions about their asthma.

Dr Jenkins said, "Some breathing exercises are known to improve asthma symptoms, however they have never been shown scientifically to improve the severity of the disease itself.

"As patients are interested in complementary approaches to asthma management it is important for health professionals to study and better understand non-drug interventions that patients perceive as useful in controlling their asthma symptoms.

The following comments were made by patients involved in the study:

- “I feel relaxed, confident in controlling the asthma, relieved”
- “I am no longer worried about my asthma. I no longer have daily symptoms”
- “I am certain the whole thing has helped me”
- “The exercises were outstandingly effective in making me feel better than any other time in 30 years”

57 subjects completed the controlled, double-blind, randomised parallel group study. The study ran for 30 weeks across two sites – Melbourne’s Alfred Hospital and Sydney’s Woolcock Institute of Medical Research. Patients were randomly assigned to one of two sets of breathing exercises, either shallow nasal breathing exercises, or upper body exercises. The study investigators remained blinded to which type of breathing exercises each patient was using, in order to avoid bias. For the first 16 weeks, participants were asked to practise the exercises each day at home, while using their entry level of inhaled corticosteroids. During the second stage, which ran for 14 weeks, participants were asked to continue their breathing exercises, while the doctors reduced the dosage of inhaled corticosteroids.

This study was funded by the CRC for Asthma.