

BETTER FOR ASTHMATICS TO STAY ON MEDICATION

Mild asthmatics should take preventer medication on a regular basis, rather than take it intermittently when their symptoms worsen, a new Australian study has found.

The year-long study involving 44 mild asthma sufferers showed continuous treatment with a low dose inhaled corticosteroid (ICS) led to a significant reduction in the rate of asthma flare-ups in patients. It also improved lung function, reduced airway hyper responsiveness and reduced exhaled nitric oxide, indicating less airway inflammation was present

The study was undertaken by Sydney's Woolcock Institute of Medical Research with the aim of finding out whether it was safe and appropriate for patients with mild asthma to take preventer medicine only when symptoms worsen.

Dr Christine Jenkins, Head of the Airways Research Group, at the Woolcock Institute, explains one of the most important goals of asthma treatment is to maintain good asthma control on the lowest effective dose of preventer, as advocated by best practice guidelines for asthma.

We know that people with mild asthma often don't like taking their medication regularly, especially when they feel fine, but prefer to take it when symptoms get worse, she said.

We did this study to see whether treating asthma only when flare-ups occurred was a good idea. It seems it isn't.

Dr Jenkins said the trial group appeared to have only mild or well controlled asthma, but the group who received the ICS only intermittently during the study did less well in the primary outcome measures than the group who took low dose ICS all year.

A significant clinically important difference was seen in the asthma flare-up rate between the two groups, as well as in lung function, airway responsiveness (the sensitivity or twitchiness of the airways) and daily peak flow tests.

Interestingly symptoms recorded by all subjects were pretty consistent, said Dr Jenkins.

What this indicates is that judgements about ceasing medication for mild asthma sufferers should not be made solely on symptom control.

The Woolcock Institute of Medical Research conducts research into the causes, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of respiratory diseases, such as asthma, as well as investing time educating Australians about these diseases.

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