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OBESITY & ASTHMA by Michael Cabana MD, MPH

There have been more items in the news lately about a possible link between asthma and obesity. Recent studies have examined pieces of this puzzle, finding some answers, but leading to even more questions.

According to a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), obese adults were 66% more likely than adults of normal weight to have asthma¹. Other studies have found that women who gained weight after age 18 had an increased risk of developing asthma² and that female reproductive hormones may contribute to the onset of asthma among adult women³.

Another study showed that while obesity is a risk factor for self-reported asthma, many more obese than non-obese subjects were using bronchodilators despite a lack of objective evidence for airflow obstruction (e.g. pulmonary function tests). This suggests that causes other than airflow obstruction are responsible for the onset of shortness of breath in obesity, and that asthma might be overdiagnosed in the obese population⁴.

Childhood asthma and obesity have risen in tandem over the last 20 years, but the nature of that relationship remains vague. A high, not low, birth weight has been found to be a risk factor for increased emergency visits for asthma during childhood⁵. A large Canadian study found there was no statistical association between obesity and asthma among children age 4 to 11 years⁶. In a study of U.S. inner-city children with asthma, obese children used more medicine, wheezed more, and a greater proportion had unscheduled ED visits than thinner children⁷.

Some potential explanations for the apparent link between asthma and obesity that require further research include: insulin resistance, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) as a result of obesity, physical inactivity promoting both obesity and asthma, and diet. There may be no causal connection between the two conditions, and more research is needed to complete this complex puzzle. ☀

Sources:

1. Risk factors for asthma in US adults: results from the 2000 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Gwynn RC, J Asthma, 2004 Feb;41(1):91-8
2. Prospective Study of Body Mass Index, Weight Change, and Risk of Adult-onset Asthma in Women. Camargo, CA et al, Arch Intern Med, 1999;159:2582-2588
3. Prospective Study of Postmenopausal Hormone Use and Newly Diagnosed Asthma and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. Barr RG et al, Arch Intern Med. 2004;164:379-386
4. Obesity is a risk factor for dyspnea but not for air-flow obstruction. Sin DD, et al, Arch Intern Med. 2002 162(13):1477-81
5. The relationship between birth weight and childhood asthma: a population-based cohort study. Sin DD, et al, Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med. 2004 Jan;158(1):60-4
6. Is obesity associated with asthma in young children? To T, et al, J Pediatr. 2004 Feb;144(2):162-8
7. Do obese inner-city children with asthma have more symptoms than nonobese children with asthma? Belamarich PF et al, Pediatrics. 2000 Dec;106(6):1436-41

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- ☀ For the general population of adults in Michigan, 60.4% are either overweight or obese.
- ☀ For Michigan adults who have been told in their lifetime that they have asthma, 62.2% are either overweight or obese.
- ☀ Among Michigan adults who currently have asthma, 66.7% are either overweight or obese.

Source: Michigan Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, 2001.



ASTHMA COALITION COLUMN



Focus on: Mid-Michigan Asthma Coalition

One of 14 independent asthma coalitions in Michigan, the Mid-Michigan Asthma Coalition (M-MAC) works to improve the quality of life for people with asthma.

Since 1999, M-MAC has offered a variety of community asthma education events. Most recently, the group held an educational event for Lansing middle-schoolers in honor of World Asthma Day. The coalition worked with the Lansing School District and the Impression 5 Science Museum to arrange for busloads of kids to participate. Each child visited nine displays to learn about different aspects of asthma care and control, including some real pig lungs and an asthma jeopardy game. The idea for this event came from the Detroit Asthma Coalition, which has held their World Asthma Day event at the "New" Detroit Science Center for the past 2 years.

"Our expectations were surpassed," said Mary Davidson, coordinator for the coalition. "Of the 100 kids who attended, 60 had asthma, and the feedback from all who attended was terrific! We plan to do it again next year."

Previous successful events have targeted teens, physicians, nurses and other health care professionals, and day care staff. This fall the group plans to host an educational gathering for area coaches and athletic trainers.

Want to find out more about the Mid-Michigan Asthma Coalition? Need to find an asthma coalition near you? Visit www.GetAsthmaHelp.org and click on Coalitions. ☀

Please direct questions and comments about this newsletter to:

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Visit www.GetAsthmaHelp.org for more information about asthma events & trainings in your area.

SUMMER ASTHMA TIP:

Pollen & Spores

It is difficult to completely avoid pollen and mold spores during the warm months, but try these tips on avoiding these common asthma triggers.

Check with your local news media to find out when pollen and mold counts are high, and keep your windows closed. Use air conditioning indoors, or if you don't have air conditioning, use your furnace fan and a high-efficiency filter (such as Filtrete™) to take the pollen and mold spores out of your home.

Airborne grass pollen, a common asthma trigger, is usually at its highest levels between the hours of 6 and 10 a.m. Cutting the grass later in the day will reduce exposure to grass pollen.

Remember to keep taking your controller medication during the summer, even if you feel good. You wouldn't want to waste any of this precious warm weather in the hospital! ☀



MI ASTHMA CALENDAR

July

- 12- [Hurley Medical Center/GCCATF Asthma Camp](#)
- 13 University of Michigan Flint Campus Recreation Center, for ages 7-12, 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., free but must pre-register, For more info: 810-230-1470 or 810-257-9591
- 16- [Association of Asthma Educators Conference](#)
- 18 Sheraton Society Hill, Philadelphia, PA For more info: 888-988-7747 or www.asthmaeducators.org
- 27 [Living With Asthma Night - American Lung Association of Michigan](#)
Wayne County Community College, Northwest Campus Auditorium, 6 to 8 p.m., free, For more info: 313-943-4000

September

- 14 [Summit of Michigan Asthma Coalitions](#)
Henry Center for Executive Development, Lansing, 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. For more info: 517-484-7206
- 15 [Asthma Information Review \(AIR\) Course](#)
Crystal Mountain Resort, Thompsonville, 7:45 a.m. to 5 p.m., For more info: 734-677-6772