

# ALERT

Find out more... visit [www.GetAsthmaHelp.org](http://www.GetAsthmaHelp.org)

## EATING FOR BETTER BREATHING

by Lawrence Kurlandsky, MD

When diagnosed with asthma, people often ask whether a change in diet might help their symptoms. Popular media and the Internet are full of stories about various vitamins or nutritional supplements "curing" asthma, but asthma cannot be cured with such supplements, or by drinking herbal teas. However, studies have begun to show that diet may affect asthma symptoms, and there are certain times when people with asthma may want to adjust their diets.

People with asthma generally have the same nutritional requirements as people without asthma. Aside from avoiding specific foods to which one is allergic, people with asthma eat the same type of diets as others in this country. Unfortunately, this often means too many calories, too much saturated and polyunsaturated fats such as margarine, and too few fruits and vegetables. Obesity may worsen asthma. Studies have shown that more vitamins than the recommended daily requirements are not needed, but increasing one's intake of fruits such as apples and pears, reducing one's intake of fats such as corn oil and margarine, and increasing one's intake of fats such as canola, walnut, or flaxseed oils or cold water fish, may be helpful in reducing symptoms. In the case of a mother-to-be with asthma or allergies, these diet changes may actually prevent the development of asthma in her offspring. In addition, most studies recommend breastfeeding to reduce the chances of developing allergies and asthma in infancy.

Sometimes steroid pills, such as prednisone, are needed to regain or maintain control of asthma. If used for long periods of time, they can interfere with the body's use of specific nutrients: calcium, potassium, sodium, protein, and vitamins D and C. Eating a well balanced diet becomes even more important. Steroid pills can also increase the risk of osteoporosis - weak bones through the increased loss of calcium, so it is very important to eat calcium-rich foods. Limiting the use of salt and foods that are high in sodium, cholesterol, and saturated fats can help avoid other side effects.

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) has been associated with asthma and may make it worse. In this condition, the valve between the stomach and esophagus (swallowing tube) is weak and allows stomach acid to travel up the esophagus, irritating it and causing heartburn. This reflux irritation may also affect the lungs, causing

coughing or wheezing. People with GERD may have trouble breathing at night or upon awakening. If you believe that your asthma is triggered by GERD, you should talk to your doctor about treatment or helpful diet changes.

While diet changes and supplements can't cure asthma, eating a well balanced diet can complement asthma care. If you are concerned about your diet, talk to your doctor or a registered dietician about changing your diet in safe and helpful ways. ❄️

*Dr. Kurlandsky is a Grand Rapids area pediatric pulmonologist/allergist-immunologist who has published a nutrition study in cystic fibrosis, and participated in a study looking at the effects of a commercial phyto and glyconutritional supplement in children with asthma.*

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- ❄️ 80% of adults with asthma in Michigan reported that they eat fruits and/or vegetables less than five times per day.
- ❄️ Among adults with asthma in Michigan, 72% are overweight (BMI ≥ 25), and 40% are obese (BMI ≥ 30).

Source: Michigan Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, 2003



## ASTHMA COALITION COLUMN



### Focus on: Washtenaw Asthma Coalition

The Washtenaw Asthma Coalition (WAC) is one of 14 independent local asthma coalitions in Michigan.

The Washtenaw County Health Department performs an extensive community survey every 5 years, and in 1995, their data showed that Washtenaw County had "pockets" of asthma incidence and rates that were higher than the statewide and national rates.

To address this, the WAC, then known as Asthma Surveillance Team, published an extensive report, with recommendations for future work, in 1997. WAC was formed in 1999, with a mission to prevent the development of asthma and to improve the quality of life of asthmatics through community-wide collaboration.

The WAC continues to use the health department data to target activities to specific areas of the county, specifically the pediatric population in the Ypsilanti area. There was good news in the results of the 2000 survey-- fewer children with asthma are having severe symptoms.

"We are thrilled to think that we have helped to improve some people's lives," said Karla Grossman, coordinator of the WAC. "Having the data really helps us target our efforts, and know if we've had an impact."

WAC is also using data collected at local hospitals and schools to help them identify and address the needs of their community.

To find out more about WAC, or to find a coalition near you, visit [www.GetAsthmaHelp.org](http://www.GetAsthmaHelp.org) and click on Coalitions. ❄️

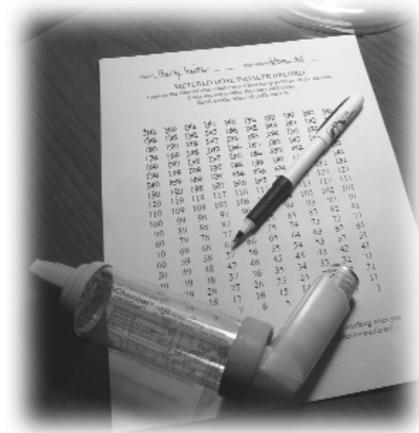
Please direct questions and comments about this newsletter to:

MI Asthma Communication Network  
c/o American Lung Assoc. of Michigan  
403 Seymour Avenue  
Lansing, MI 48933-1179  
phone: 1-866-395-8647  
e-mail: [info@GetAsthmaHelp.org](mailto:info@GetAsthmaHelp.org)

## WINTER ASTHMA TIP: Counting puffs

All people with asthma need to have a quick-relief inhaler handy, but it's tough to know how full that inhaler is. You may have heard that you should float your inhaler in some water to see if you need a refill, or only refill if you can't hear anything when you shake it. Neither of those ways is accurate.

The only true way to know how many puffs you have left is to keep track of how many you have used. A simple number check-off sheet is available online at [www.GetAsthmaHelp.org/mdirecord.doc](http://www.GetAsthmaHelp.org/mdirecord.doc) (or call 1-866-395-8647) along with directions on how it should be used.



Drug manufacturers are developing counting devices for inhalers, but until they are available, don't get caught with an empty inhaler when you need it most. Know exactly when to refill-- keep track of each puff used. ❄️

## ASTHMA EDUCATOR UPDATE

There are now over 1,000 certified asthma educators in the U.S., with 45 in Michigan. If you are thinking about taking the exam, [www.naecb.org](http://www.naecb.org) is a great place to find exam and educator information. ❄️

Visit  
[www.GetAsthmaHelp.org](http://www.GetAsthmaHelp.org)  
or call 866-395-8647 for more  
information about asthma  
events & trainings in your area.



## MI ASTHMA CALENDAR

### January

- 20 American Lung Assoc. of Michigan Freedom From Smoking Facilitator Training  
Quality Suites Hotel, Lansing, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., For more info: 248-784-2012

### February

- 2 What is Asthma? Medications and More - community event  
Marshall Fields, Genesee Valley Mall, community room, 6:30 to 8 p.m., For more info: 810-257-9591
- 17 Living with Asthma Night  
WMU Downtown Graduate & Conf. Ctr., 7 to 8:30 p.m., free, call for info about Lansing Night, For more info: 517-484-7266 or 800-678-5864

- 25 Asthma Information Review (AIR) Course  
Michigan Heart and Vascular Institute, Ann Arbor, 7:45 a.m. to 5 p.m., For more info: 734-677-6772

### March

- 21 Asthma Information Review (AIR) Course  
Amway Grand Plaza, Grand Rapids, 7:45 a.m. to 5 p.m., For more info: 734-677-6772