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Becoming an Expert Patient: Find the Right PATH

by Jane Braatz, PhD

The Personal Action Toward Health (PATH) program was created to help adults with ongoing health problems, such as asthma, diabetes, emphysema, arthritis, bronchitis, heart disease and obesity. The program builds confidence around managing health, staying active, and enjoying life. This is accomplished by providing self-management tools and skills to deal with ongoing health problems through problem-solving, decision making and group support. No disease-specific treatment advice is given, the leaders refer participants to their doctors for any medical concerns.



I have both arthritis and cancer, and am a PATH leader and master trainer. One of the participants in a PATH class summed up what the class is all about. She stated, "the class helped me get my act together." It made me aware of what was important in managing my ongoing health problem and showed me tools to use to take control. The group support made me realize others faced similar problems.

Each PATH class meets for six sessions, one-day per week and two and one-half hours per session. The class size is small - 10 to 16 people. Two trained leaders guide the class with either one or both having an ongoing health condition. Leaders must be under a licensed agency and go through four days of training prior to being allowed to co-lead a PATH class.

Class topics include dealing with symptoms, coping with difficult emotions, understanding medications, working with a health care team, communication skills, relaxation techniques, eating well, and exercising safely and effectively. Family members, friends and caregivers are also encouraged to attend the workshop.

The program was developed by Stanford University and was tested in randomized trials with over 1,000 participants with chronic diseases. Participants reported improved: symptom management, communication with physicians; self-efficacy, physical activity, and general health compared to those who had not participated in the program. Further studies showed that program participants spent fewer nights in the hospital and used fewer health services over a two year period compared to use of the hospital and health services prior to the program.

There are many ways that you can be a part of PATH program. Whether you are interested as a individual with an ongoing health condition, a caregiver or friend of someone with an ongoing health condition, a health care professional, or an organization promoting the class to employees, patients or clients, you could:

- sign up and go to a PATH workshop
- find and refer potential leaders to be trained to conduct PATH in your area
- help arrange PATH workshops to be held in the communities you serve

- promote PATH workshops to people with asthma
- refer clients served through case management or asthma education to attend a PATH workshop
- tell health professionals about PATH and the benefits of referring clients to PATH

For more information about licensed agencies in Michigan, regional contacts, or workshops in your area, please contact Karen Olson at OlsonK2@michigan.gov or 517-335-1236.

Jane Braatz is owner of Health For Life Consulting, Inc., where she consults with various agencies on health education and fitness. She is a Certified Health/Fitness Instructor through the American College of Sports Medicine and a Master Trainer in EnhanceFitness, Matter of Balance and Personal Action Toward Health (PATH).

Michigan PATH Statistics

- 14% of people who participated in a PATH workshop in 2008 stated that they had asthma
- 113 workshops were held in Michigan in 2008, 103 are already scheduled for 2009
- 884 people completed a PATH workshop in 2008



Quick Links

[AIM Website ~ GetAsthmaHelp.org](#)

[Michigan Asthma Statistics](#)

[Michigan PATH information](#)

[AIM Event Calendar](#)

Ask an Asthma Educator

Guest Educator: Steven Hamick, BIS, RRT, AE-C

I read online that certain herbs can be used as an alternative treatment for asthma. This sounds more natural to me than taking prescription medicine every day, and my asthma seems under control, so I'm thinking about trying it. Can it help? ~ Amaad from Pontiac

Dear Amaad,

You ask a great question. Throughout history, people with asthma have looked for various ways to relieve their asthma. From the ancient worlds of Egypt, India, and China until the mid-1800s, common remedies included inhaling vapors from herbals, chewing on plant leaves (ma huang, belladonna, etc), and blood letting.

Today, we know that asthma is a very complex disease, and know what happens in the lung at each step of an asthma attack. Because of this, science has been able to make and target medicines to help symptoms or prevent an asthma attack.



The National Institutes of Health's (NIH) panel of asthma scientists and experts has created asthma diagnosis and treatment standards based on current scientific research. Currently, these asthma experts caution against using herbals for asthma. Few scientific studies with herbals have been done, and those that have are of variable quality. These experts also state that herbals may have harmful ingredients and some may also interact with other medications you may be taking. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (USFDA), which regulates prescription drugs, has approved some herbs for certain uses, but it does not regulate most herbal supplements, and no herbal supplements have been approved to treat asthma. However, the NIH National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine is encouraging the scientific community to develop quality clinical trials for herbals, and some of these are now underway.

Until these herbal studies can show that they are safe and effective, the NIH advises using the treatment plan and medicines from your doctor. If you are still thinking about adding herbals into your treatment plan, consult with your doctor before you begin any herbal regimen. You should always check with your doctor before stopping, or changing how you take, your usual medications. There really is no reason to take a chance on risky "alternatives" like herbal treatments when proven medical treatment keeps you symptom-free.

For tips on spotting quack products or treatments, visit the [AIM website](#).



Michigan Asthma Calendar

April

20 Asthma 1-2-3 Facilitator Training, Ellen Thompson Women's Health Center, Ypsilanti, 9 a.m. to 12 noon. For more info: Alison Nix, 517.484.7266 or anix@alam.org

29-30 Freedom From Smoking Facilitator Training, American Lung Association of Michigan office, Lansing. For more info: Alison Nix, 517.484.7266 or anix@alam.org

May

1 Mid-Michigan Asthma Coalition World Asthma Day Event, Impression 5 Science Center, Lansing, 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. For more info: Sharon Page, 517.975.6400 or sharon.page@irmc.org

7 Washtenaw Asthma Coalition World Asthma Day Event, Dr. Alan Baptist on "Asthma, Allergies and the Hygiene Hypothesis," St. Joseph Mercy Hospital, Ann Arbor Campus, Ann Arbor, 6 to 9 p.m. For more info: Karla Stoermer-Grossman, kstoerme@umich.edu

19 Asthma 1-2-3 Facilitator Training, Covenant Health Care, Saginaw, 1 to 4 p.m. For more info: Patty Inman, 810.953.3951 or pinman@alam.org

21-22 Freedom From Smoking Facilitator Training, St. Mary's Wege Center, Grand Rapids. For more info: Alison Nix, 517.484.7266 or anix@alam.org

28 Asthma 1-2-3 Facilitator Training, Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services, Kalamazoo, 1 to 4 p.m. For more info: Alison Nix, 517.484.7266 or anix@alam.org

June

1 Asthma 1-2-3 Facilitator Training, Great Wolf Lodge, Traverse City, 9 a.m. to 12 noon. For

more info: Alison Nix, 517.484.7266 or anix@alam.org

2-3 Freedom From Smoking Facilitator Training, Great Wolf Lodge, Traverse City. For more info: Alison Nix, 517.484.7266 or anix@alam.org

9 Asthma 1-2-3 Facilitator Training, American Lung Association of Michigan office, Lansing, 9 a.m. to 12 noon. For more info: Alison Nix, 517.484.7266 or anix@alam.org



Please direct questions and comments about this newsletter to the Michigan Asthma Communication Network, American Lung Association of Michigan, 403 Seymour Avenue, Lansing, Michigan 48933
Phone: 1.866.EZLUNGS (395.8647)

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