

Tackle Problem Of Obesity To Combat Rising Cases Of Asthma Attack, Say City Doctors

BREATHE EASY

Risha Chitlangia | TNN

New Delhi: In order to combat the rising numbers of asthma cases in India, city doctors say it is important to address the problem of obesity. It is among the several medical conditions, like diabetes and sleep disorders, which play a critical role in aggravating an asthma attack.

A recent study published in the American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine claims a direct link between obesity and development of a phenomenon known as dynamic hyperinflation when air breathed into the lungs cannot be exhaled. It is seen in many cases where obese patients face serious difficulty in breathing and those with asthma

start gasping for breath. "Due to increase in fat deposition in the abdomen, the diaphragmatic boundary is pushed upwards, and because of this the lungs' space is compromised. This obstructs lung function," says Dr Anoop Misra, director and head of department, diabetes & metabolic diseases, Fortis Healthcare.

With obesity becoming a common problem in children, there is all the more reason to worry. Doctors say it might trigger wheezing or an asthma attack. "It is often seen that obese children run short of breath if they do even a small physical exercise. These kids have lower lung reserve and are not able to exhale properly," says Dr Sanjeev Bagai, head of the department, paediatrics, and director,

Rockland Hospital.

Along with obesity, it's co-morbidities like type 2 diabetes, hypertension, gastro-

WORLD ASTHMA DAY

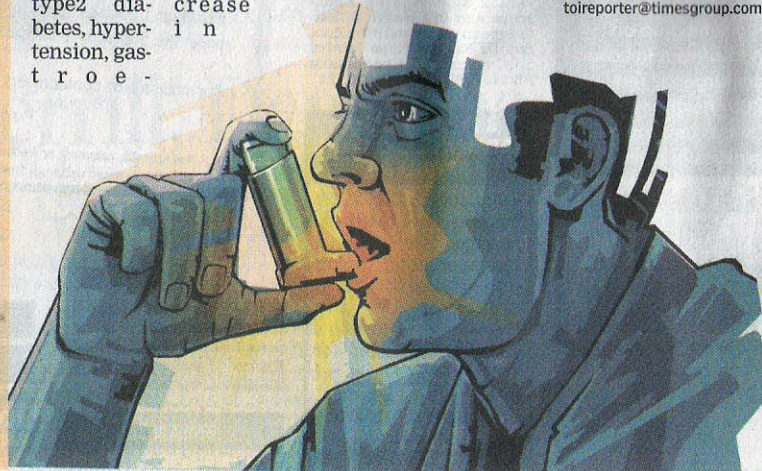
sophageal reflux etc can also result in worsening of asthma. "Diabetes and hypertension can affect any part of the body. It can also have a damaging effect on lungs because of which respiratory system can get affected," says Dr Vivek Jaggi, senior consultant, pulmonologist, Artemis Health Institute.

Asthmatic patients with sleep disorders are more prone to getting an attack. "The lower airway is as it is compromised in asthmatic patients. But due to sleep disorders, the situation becomes worse, as the upper airway also gets affected. A lot of patients on medication for asthma complain of problem in sleeping as the medicine has stimulants. And in sleep apnea or snoring, a person's upper airway space gets narrow and this further reduces the supply of oxygen to the lungs. Decrease in

oxygen level in blood can affect the sympathetic nervous control like heart rate, pulse etc. Such patients are at a higher risk of getting a heart attack, increase in heart rate, stroke etc, as compared to other asthma patients," warns Dr Manvir Bhatia, chairperson, sleep medicine, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital. With the change in season, there are pollens and other allergens in the air. So asthma patients need to look out. But better management and precautions can certainly help.

There are a host of patient-friendly devices in asthma care that are now available in the metros. There are newer drug delivery devices, better medicines and pocket-sized oxygen cylinders that assure asthmatics of a better quality of life. Medicines for asthma used in the West now make their way to Indian shores almost simultaneously. At the hospital end too technology promises better treatment.

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Asthma Factsheet

Asthma is a chronic disease characterised by recurrent attacks of breathlessness, tightness in chest and wheezing. During an asthma attack, the lining of the bronchial tubes swell, causing the airways to narrow and reducing the flow of air in and out of the lungs.



Causes

Though the exact cause isn't known, it is triggered by varied factors, the commonest being pollen, dust mites, tobacco smoke and cold breeze. Certain medications such as aspirin and other non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs, and beta-blockers (which are used to treat high blood pressure, heart conditions and migraine) could trigger asthma.

Statistics

- * There are 300 million people suffering from asthma around the world and 2,55,000 people died of it in 2005.
- * Over 80% of asthma deaths occurs in developing countries.
- * Asthma is the most common chronic disease among children.

Asthma management

Medicines

Controllers: They are medicines which prevent asthma attacks from starting. There are two types of controller medicines: anti-inflammatory medicines and airway openers.

Relievers: They are medicines that provide rapid relief from an asthma attack by quickly opening up the narrowed airways (dilating the bronchi) and are also called bronchodilators.

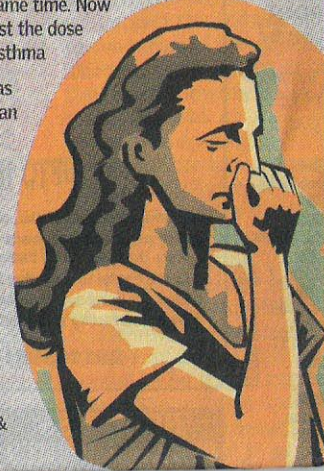
COMBINATION MEDICATIONS contain both relievers and controllers in the same inhaler. So they open up the airways and reduce the underlying inflammation at the same time. Now combination inhalers let you adjust the dose of drugs to the severity of your asthma

BREATHING EXERCISES such as pranayam, or blowing a balloon can help build lung power

FOODSTUFFS such as imli, cold beverages, icecreams and bananas act as triggers for some patients and are best avoided. Micronutrients such as magnesium, available in papaya or green leafy vegetables, are known to help build immunity among asthmatics.

Keep pets away

(Source: Global Initiative for Asthma & World Health Organisation)



Could it be mere anxiety?

Emotional factors alone can't bring on asthma. However, anxiety can cause hyperventilation or "over-breathing" and thus worsen the symptoms of asthma or aggravate attacks, observes the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology. Scientific studies have shown that patients with asthma are likely to be more anxious than others and may also have clinically diagnosed panic disorder.

A paper published in the British Medical Journal by a general practitioner in Oxfordshire Duncan Keeley and senior research fellow Liesl Osman studied the co-existence of asthma and anxiety-related breathing problems. "Since there is an overlap of symptoms of asthma and anxiety, doctors should be careful about repeatedly taking medical history and physiological measurements such as peak flow recordings," it observes. The paper suggests doctors should routinely gauge what causes anxiety in patients so as to avoid unnecessarily stepping up their asthma doses if it is an episode of anxiety.