

Benefits of Buteyko, a proven, non-drug treatment for Asthma

Summary for UK health professionals 2009

High Cost of Asthma

The impact of asthma in the UK on society, the economy and the NHS is serious. The following data were taken from the British Lung Foundation website¹;

- Asthma affects more than five million people in the UK.
- Asthma is the fourth largest cause of hospital admissions.
- More than 1,300 people a year still lose their lives from asthma in the UK.
- The total estimated cost of asthma in the UK is in the region of £2,237 million.
- Of this, direct costs in the UK to the NHS are £889 million.
- Difficult to control asthma costs the NHS £680 million a year.
- Emergency hospital admissions for asthma cost the NHS more than £45.8 million a year.
- Asthma care is likely to cost a PCT over £4.25 million a year
- The human cost is immeasurable.

Buteyko Cost Benefits

GPs who have taught their patients **Buteyko**, a natural breathing technique, have seen substantial cost savings.

- Dr Gerald Spence in Glasgow (1998) made a saving of two thirds or £10,000 per year on medications for 34 asthmatic patients after **Buteyko**².
- Dr Rupert Manley in Cornwall (2006) saved £2000 on medications for 13 patients in first year after **Buteyko**³.

Buteyko method for Asthma: Clinical trials

Seven small clinical trials have shown that **Buteyko** is safe and effective and reduces need for medication, summary below (Table 1)⁴⁻¹⁰. **Buteyko** has not yet been tested in larger studies.

British Guideline on the Management of Asthma 2008.

British Guideline on the Management of Asthma¹¹ grants permission for British health professionals to recommend **Buteyko**, stating that the method "may be considered to help patients control the symptoms of asthma". The guideline grades clinical research on **Buteyko** with a 'B' classification - indicating that high quality supporting clinical trials are available (Table 2). The only other non-pharmacological management with a B rating is immunotherapy (with the possibility of severe reactions).

Buteyko method for Asthma

People with asthma hyperventilate, that is they breathe more air than is required for metabolic activity at that time. This chronic hyperventilation can go unnoticed, and is even encouraged in the mistaken belief of western society that 'deep breathing is good for you.' This kind of breathing leads to chronically low oxygenation of tissue cells by excessive loss of carbon dioxide (Bohr effect) and can worsen asthma in susceptible individuals by constricting airways, stimulating excessive mucus production and promoting inflammation of lung tissues. **Buteyko** addresses the underlying bad breathing.

Buteyko breathing technique is taught as part of a full educational programme that has been proven to:

- Restore a more normal breathing pattern and volume
- Reduce the symptoms of asthma
- Improve quality of life
- Reduce the need for medication.

In addition to gradually changing the breathing pattern, the **Buteyko** programme provides participants with skills to cope with every day situations that normally provoke symptoms. It strongly encourages a healthy lifestyle with physical activity, a sensible diet, reduction of stress and an appropriate amount of sleep.

Buteyko: Important Points

- **Buteyko** does not interfere with the doctor/patient relationship, but instead encourages communication.
- **Buteyko** is not about throwing medication away, but encourages the use of medications as recommended by current best practice medicine.
- **Buteyko** is not promoted as a magic cure, but when chosen as a treatment for hyperventilation it provides the student with a range of skills and a better understanding of their condition.

How to learn the Buteyko technique

Buteyko is suitable for motivated individuals who are keen to improve their health, while receiving support from their current medical provider.

Buteyko is taught either on an individual basis or in small groups. Each session runs for 60 – 90 minutes and it is normal for the person to attend a minimum of five sessions over the space of two weeks as a course enrolment. Patients must continue to practice the breathing exercises at home as instructed. Refresher courses are free of charge for the first year if required. A telephone help line is also provided free for the first year.

Other Conditions that Buteyko can help

- Rhinitis
- Allergies
- Insomnia
- Snoring
- Sleep apnoea
- Panic and hyperventilation attacks

References

- 1) British Lung Foundation April 2009 <http://www.lunguk.org/media-and-campaigning/media-centre/lung-stats-and-facts/asthma.htm>
- 2) BBC 1998 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/153320.stm>
- 3) BBC 2006 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/cornwall/5096844.stm>
- 4) Cowie RL, Conley DP, Underwood MF, Reader PG. A randomized controlled trial of the **Buteyko** technique as an adjunct to conventional management of asthma. *Resp Med* 2008; 102:726-32.
- 5) McHugh P, Duncan B, Houghton F. **Buteyko** breathing technique and asthma in children: a case series. 2) *N Z Med J.* 2006;119:(1234)
- 6) Slader CA, Reddel HK, Spencer LM, Belousova EG, Armour CL, Bosnic-Anticevich SZ, Thien FC, Jenkins CR. Double blind randomised controlled trial of two different breathing techniques in the management of asthma. *Thorax.* 2006 61:651-6.
- 7) Cooper S, Osborne J, Newton S, Harrison V, Thompson-Coon J, Lewis S, Tattersfield A. Effect of two breathing exercises (**Buteyko** and Pranayama) in asthma: a randomized controlled trial. *Thorax* 2003;58:674-679
- 8) McHugh P, Aitcheson F, Duncan B, Houghton F. **Buteyko** Breathing Technique for asthma: an effective intervention. *N Z Med J.* 2003 Dec 12;116(1187):U710.
- 9) Opat AJ, Cohen MM, Bailey MJ, Abramson MJ. A clinical trial of the **Buteyko** Breathing Technique in asthma as taught by a video. *J Asthma* 2000;37:557–64.
- 10) Bowler SD, Green A, Mitchell CA. **Buteyko** breathing techniques in asthma: a blinded randomised controlled trial. *Med J Aust* 1998;169:575–8.
- 11) British Thoracic Society & Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN). British Guideline on the Management of Asthma. Guideline No. 101. Edinburgh:SIGN; 2008. <http://www.sign.ac.uk/pdf/grg101.pdf>

Further reading

The website of the practitioners who taught **Buteyko** in three of the published studies: <http://www.butekoworks.com/>

Booklet: <http://members.westnet.com.au/pkolb/but-bk3.pdf>

More detailed summary of trials: <http://knol.google.com/k/alex-spence/asthma-research-results/202i29i90v7sn/19#>

Table 1. Summary of seven Buteyko clinical trials⁴⁻¹⁰.

Date/Place	CANADA 2008 6 months	NEW ZEALAND 2006 6 months	AUSTRALIA 2006 8 months	ENGLAND 2003 6 months	NEW ZEALAND 2003 6 months	AUSTRALIA 2000 4 weeks	AUSTRALIA 1998 3 months
Author	Cowie RL et al	McHugh P et al	Slader CA et al.	Cooper S et al.	McHugh P et al	Opat AJ	Bowler SD et al
Sponsor	anonymous donor	JN Williams Memorial Trust and the Tairawhiti Complementary and Traditional Therapies Research Trust	Cooperative Research Centre for Asthma, jointly funded by the Australian Federal Government and Industry, including AstraZeneca, Aventis Pharma and GlaxoSmithKline	National Asthma Campaign – now Asthma UK	White Cross Group and the Tairawhiti Therapeutics and Arts Trust	No funding voluntary	Australian Association of Asthma Foundations
Buteyko training/ Practitioner n	5 consecutive days, BIBH, Jennifer Stark n=56	5 consecutive days, BIBH, Jennifer and Russell Stark n=8 children	learned and practised by video n=23	5 sessions over weekend or consecutive evenings, Susan Mitchell n=23	teaching over 7 days BIBH, Russell Stark n=17	taught by video n=18	teaching over 7 days BIBH, Tess Graham n=19
Reliever medication	N/a	Decrease 66%	Decrease 86%	Decrease	Decrease 85%	Decrease	Decrease 90%
Preventer medication	Decrease	Decrease 41%	Decrease 50%	No change	Decrease 50%	?	Decrease 50% (not sig)
Symptom control	Proportion increased from 40% to 79%	Increase	Improvement	Increase	N/a	?	N/a
QOL	Increase	Increase	Some improvement.	Limited improvement	N/a	Increase	Increase (trend)
Minute volume	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	Decrease
Lung function	No change	N/a	No change	No change	No change	?	No change

Table 2. British Guideline on the Management of Asthma 2008¹¹.

COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINES		
	Research Findings	Recommendation
Acupuncture	Research studies have not demonstrated a clinically valuable benefit and no significant benefits in relation to lung function.	Insufficient evidence to make a recommendation.
Buteyko technique	The Buteyko breathing technique specifically focuses on control of hyperventilation. Trials suggest benefits in terms of reduced symptoms and bronchodilator usage but no effect on lung function.	B Buteyko breathing technique may be considered to help patients to control the symptoms of asthma.
Family therapy	May be a useful adjunct to medication in children with asthma.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> In difficult childhood asthma, there may be a role for family therapy as an adjunct to pharmacotherapy.
Herbal and Chinese Medicines	Trials report variable benefits.	Insufficient evidence to make a recommendation.
Homeopathy	Studies looking at individualised homeopathy are needed.	Insufficient evidence to make a recommendation.
Hypnosis and relaxation therapies	No evidence of efficacy. Muscle relaxation could conceivably benefit lung function in patients with asthma.	Larger blinded trials are needed before a recommendation can be made.
Ionisers	Air ionisers are of no benefit in reducing symptoms.	A Air ionisers are not recommended for the treatment of asthma.
Physical exercise therapy	Studies suggest that such interventions make one fitter, but there is no effect on asthma	No evidence of specific benefit.

BBC Programmes On Effectiveness of Buteyko method

- 1) BBC QED UK 1998 National
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0-0Rgp2ZKI>
- 2) BBC Inside Out 2004 Scilly Isles
 Woman with COPD
 Nikki, professional singer with asthma – hoarseness
<http://www.buteykoasthmapractice.com/insideout.html>
- 3) BBC Spotlight 2006 Cornwall
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhVmsBCI-vc>
- 4) BBC Spotlight 2007 Cornwall
<http://www.asthma999.com/spotlight2/>