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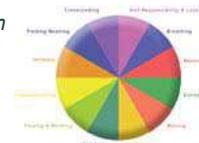
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What Doctors Don't Tell You: Pneumonia - Alternative Treatments For Pneumonia

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Breathing ?

Which of the following health conditions is not directly benefited by breathing exercises?

- Anxiety
- Fatigue
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure

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PREVENTATIVE MEASURES Pneumonia is rarely a problem in individuals with healthy immune systems - in these cases, the body's normal defence mechanisms can either shrug it off or weaken its impact. So healthy eating - perhaps boosted by multivitamin/ mineral supplements - should help to keep pneumonia at bay.

There are three specific micronutrients that are especially effective for preventing pneumonia:

* Zinc is known to be associated with weakened immune function and, thus, vulnerability to serious infectious disease. Many studies have shown that, in developing countries, giving children 20-30 mg/day of zinc will almost halve pneumonia rates (J Pediatr, 1999; 135: 689-97).

However, even in the developed world, children are often zinc-deficient. Agriculture practices, and food refining and processing have all conspired to reduce the average zinc intake in developed countries to about a third below the recommended daily minimum (J Orthomolec Med, 1995; 10: 149-64).

In cases of pneumonia, zinc appears to work by reducing lung inflammation and obstruction to the airways (Lancet, 2004; 363: 1683-8). Signs of zinc deficiency include poor wound-healing, hair loss, skin rashes, night-blindness, and impaired taste and smell.

* Vitamin C is another powerful antipneumonia weapon. A major review of over 60 separate studies by Professor Harri Hemila, of the University of Helsinki, concluded that there is a substantial and consistent benefit from vitamin C. Intakes of more than 1 g/day (which is around 20 times the recommended daily allowance) have been proved to cut pneumonia rates almost in half, especially among the elderly - even in serious cases requiring hospitalisation (Int J Tuberc Lung Dis, 1999; 3: 756-61).

* Vitamin A is recommended as it appears to be a potent infection fighter in cases of lung disease, although a vast majority of clinical trials suggest that it doesn't seem to work against pneumonia per se (Acta Paediatr, 2004; 93: 1437-42). Nevertheless, high doses of vitamin A have proven to be invaluable in measles, helping to prevent complications of the disease, one of which is pneumonia (Cochrane Database Syst Rev, 2002; 1: CD001479).

PNEUMONIA TREATMENTS Blood and swab lab tests are used to determine the causal organism, as this will affect the type of treatment. Pneumonia due to bacteria is generally treated with antibiotics, the type depending on the organism causing the infection. However, bacterial resistance is a growing problem, making the use of these drugs futile for many infectious diseases, including pneumonia. If the infection is severe, and especially in very young and old people, hospitalisation with antibiotics and fluids given intravenously, and extra oxygen via a mask, may be required. Fungal pneumonias are treated with specific antifungal drugs, but nothing is given for viral pneumonias - the immune system is left to get on with the job. Alternatively, try:

* Pleurisy root was used by Native American tribes as a herbal remedy for many infections of the lung; indeed, this plant was an official medicine in the US Pharmacopoeia until 1905. However, there is no evidence from clinical studies to support its use.

* Traditional Chinese Medicine has been shown to be very effective in childhood pneumonia. In a study involving more than 50 children, 80 per cent of them were completely cured by a combined treatment of acupuncture and herbs such as xie bai san and banxia houpo tang (J Tradit Chin Med, 1998; 18: 174-7).

* Hydrogen peroxide is an unusual treatment that appears to have been last used about 90 years ago. It involves injecting hydrogen peroxide (H2O2) into the patient's veins. In 1919, an epidemic of viral pneumonia had broken out among British troops stationed in India, resulting in four out of five men dying of the disease. Nothing seemed to work so, in desperation, the doctors tried H2O2. In their very first patient, "within six hours of the injection his fever was reduced, delirium vanished (prior to treatment the patient had to be tied to his bed due to delirium) and he was sitting up in bed and asking for food," the doctors' report read. "Over the following ten days, his temperature fell to normal and

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complete recovery resulted after a period of three weeks." This prompted the doctors to select 25 terminal cases for H2O2 treatment, which saved the lives of over half of them. The doctors concluded that the therapy worked by "rendering circulating toxins inert by oxidation" (Lancet, 1920; i: 432-3).

However, although the British army doctors found hydrogen-peroxide therapy to be a totally safe, the current medical opinion has generally turned hostile to H2O2 treatment, which is now being offered as an alternative treatment for cancer.

* Cayenne pepper (*Capsicum frutescens*) is an antimicrobial that can help control infections such as pneumonia.

* Bromelain orally reduced the volume and pus-like quality of the sputum in 124 patients in hospital because of various lung diseases, including pneumonia (J Clin Invest, 1985; 75: 456-61).

* Classical herbal preparations such as *Berberis vulgaris* (barberry root bark), *B. aquifolium* (Oregon grape root) and *Hydrastis canadensis* (goldenseal) all contain berberine, a potent bacterial infection fighter (Ann Trop Med Parasitol, 1991; 85: 417-25).

* Manuka honey has a broad antibacterial action.

* A good-quality *Lactobacillus* probiotic preparation has been shown to prevent respiratory infections in children (BMJ, 2001; 322: 1318-9, 1327-9).

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