How Does Birth Control Affect Asthma?

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Can Birth Control Affect Your Asthma

While 12 million Americans currently have asthma, the numbers do not break down evenly between genders. While asthma is more common in boys than in girls, those numbers swing the opposite direction once puberty hits. Not only are there nearly double the amount of women who have asthma compared to men, but women are also more likely to die from asthma. Because this statistical flip occurs when a girl hits puberty, researchers are now exploring the link between asthma, hormones and the effect that your birth control has on both hormones and asthma. So, can birth control affect your asthma? Let's explore it more.

Asthma and Hormones: Can Your Hormones Trigger an Asthma Attack?

You likely already know some of the most common triggers of asthma. These triggers can include pet dander, mold, pollen from weeds and grass and irritants in the air, like smoke and pollution. But if you are a woman, there may be an internal trigger that you have never thought of: your hormones.

When you went through puberty, and again during your monthly menstrual cycle, your body's levels of key hormones — progesterone, follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH), oestrogen and luteinising hormone (LH) — fluctuate dramatically. For many women, levels of estrogen and progesterone tend to peak around days 12 to 14 and days 20 to 22.

For some women, these hormones may directly affect how their airways function (thus provoking an asthma attack). Researchers also think the hormones may prompt your body to react more strongly to triggers with an inflammatory response, which is also linked to asthma attacks.

Researchers note that your fluctuating hormones at key points of your life may also create an asthma pattern that you have never noticed:

- **Puberty:** You may have experienced your first asthma attack, or an increase in asthma symptoms.
- **Before and during a period:** Approximately one-third of women notice their asthma symptoms worsen.
- **Pregnancy:** Some women develop asthma for the first time when they get pregnant or during pregnancy.
- **Menopause:** Some women notice their asthma symptoms worsen during this time.

With your hormones potentially playing such a big role in the development and maintenance of asthma, researchers have started digging into the link between birth control, your hormones and your journey with asthma.

The Link Between Asthma and Birth Control

There are several forms of birth control that are popular in North America, including physical contraceptives and hormonal birth control.

The latter prevent eggs from being released, thinning your uterus' lining so eggs do not implant and causes your body to create thicker mucus to stop sperm from going into your uterus.

Your doctor may prescribe you pills, patches or a ring that you insert, but they all tend to work the same way: they contain progestin and estrogen to influence your body's hormones. Due to their influence on your body's hormones, scientists think they may hold the answer.

According to a study published in the Chest Medical Journal, women who took estrogen experienced less airway inflammation, thereby reducing the severity of their asthma symptoms.

Similarly, women who did not take these contraceptives experienced the same increase-and-decrease cycle of symptoms during their period.

This is not the only study connecting your use of birth control with your asthma. Another study, this one conducted in Scotland, concluded that women who took hormonal contraceptives had smoother airways, reduced asthma symptoms and fewer asthma attacks.

The Best Birth Control for Asthmatics

If you are curious about whether birth control can help you control your asthma experience, follow a few key steps in coordination with your doctor.

1. **Create a written asthma action plan.** This includes a list of your triggers, your symptoms and specific dates when you have had an asthma attack or noticed an increase or decrease in symptoms.
2. **Write a peak flow diary or a period symptom diary.** Track dates and symptoms, which can help pinpoint when your body's hormones are changing.
3. **Conduct an asthma review with your doctor, asthma nurse or similar medical professional.** The two of you can work together to see if there is a clear pattern between your hormone fluctuations, menstrual cycle and asthma symptoms. Hormones may or may not be your trigger. Remember, just like with pollen or dander, not all women universally experience the same triggers.
4. **Talk to your doctor about taking a contraceptive pill and which hormonal birth controls are the best option for you and your lifestyle.** You should only do this to manage your asthma symptoms if your doctor advises it. While many women report reduced asthma attacks and gentler asthma symptoms when on birth control, it may or may not be right for you.

Your doctor can also answer any questions you have, and review your list of asthma medications to ensure they do not interfere with your birth control (or vice versa).

For example, some women may wonder, "Do inhalers affect birth control?" Corticosteroids, which may be administered via an inhaler can, in fact, influence your hormones and birth control.

This is why it is important to discuss your asthma action plan with a medical professional.

Birth Control, Hormones and Other Things to Consider

Depending on the stage of life that you are in, there are similar hormone-related topics that you may wish to discuss with your doctor.

As you get older and enter perimenopause and menopause, birth control may not be the right choice for you. Instead, your doctor may suggest hormone replacement therapy to help manage your menopause symptoms. Talk to your doctor about how this affects your hormones, and therefore your asthma. Some women have reported increased asthma symptoms when on hormone replacement therapy during menopause.

Other women's health topics that you will want to address with your doctor includes medication for period pain (some, such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory pills, may trigger an asthma attack), sex (similar to exercise or

sports, some women find it triggers an asthma attack) and the morning-after pill (it has been linked with asthma attacks).

In the end, research shows promising results when scientists look at the link between asthma and birth control. Whether that link can help you depends on your symptoms, patterns identified by you and your doctor in your asthma action plan and the other factors noted above.

With the right advice from your doctor, you can breathe easy knowing that you have potentially one more tool in your toolbox to manage your asthma!