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Asthma

Effect of two breathing exercises (Buteyko and pranayama) in asthma: a randomised controlled trial

S Cooper, J Osborne, S Newton, V Harrison, J Thompson Coon, S Lewis, A Tattersfield

[+](#) Author Affiliations

Correspondence to:

Ms S Cooper, Division of Respiratory Medicine, Clinical Sciences Building, City Hospital, Nottingham NG5 1PB, UK;

sue.cooper@nottingham.ac.uk

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Abstract

Background: Patients with asthma are interested in the use of breathing exercises but their role is uncertain. The effects of the Buteyko breathing technique, a device which mimics pranayama (a yoga breathing technique), and a dummy pranayama device on bronchial responsiveness and symptoms were compared over 6 months in a parallel group study.

Methods: Ninety patients with asthma taking an inhaled corticosteroid were randomised after a 2 week run in period to Eucapnic Buteyko breathing, use of a Pink City Lung Exerciser (PCLE) to mimic pranayama, or a PCLE placebo device. Subjects practised the techniques at home twice daily for 6 months followed by an optional steroid reduction phase. Primary outcome measures were symptom scores and change in the dose of methacholine provoking a 20% fall in FEV₁ (PD₂₀) during the first 6 months.

Results: Sixty nine patients (78%) completed the study. There was no significant difference in PD₂₀ between the three groups at 3 or 6 months. Symptoms remained relatively stable in the PCLE and placebo groups but were reduced in the Buteyko group. Median change in symptom scores at 6 months was 0 (interquartile range -1 to 1) in the placebo group, -1 (-2 to 0.75) in the PCLE group, and -3 (-4 to 0) in the Buteyko group (p=0.003 for difference between groups). Bronchodilator use was reduced in the Buteyko group by two puffs/day at 6 months; there was no change in the other two groups (p=0.005). No difference was seen between the groups in FEV₁, exacerbations, or ability to reduce inhaled corticosteroids.

Conclusion: The Buteyko breathing technique can improve symptoms and reduce bronchodilator use but does not appear to change bronchial responsiveness or lung function in patients with asthma. No benefit was shown for the Pink City Lung Exerciser.

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