

VITAL SIGNS: TREATMENTS; Biofeedback vs. Asthma

People with asthma who are taught biofeedback techniques to regulate their heart rate may be able to reduce their reliance on inhaled steroids, a new study reports.

The researchers, writing in the journal *Chest*, cautioned that patients should not try the approach until its effect was better understood. But they said they had found a clear improvement among those patients who tried it. The study was led by Dr. Paul M. Lehrer of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. For the study, 94 people with asthma were divided into four groups. Over 10 weeks, one group was taught techniques for regulating heart rate and improving breathing, the second was taught biofeedback and the third got a placebo technique that appeared to involve biofeedback but did not. The fourth was asked to do nothing unusual. The volunteers were trained at weekly sessions and asked to practice at home for 20 minutes, twice a day. They were also asked to record their asthma symptoms and measure their airflow, while the researchers kept track of their inhaler use.

All three groups that received training reported that their symptoms got better. But only in the groups taught real biofeedback techniques did researchers find improvements in lung function and reduced use of medication.