

Sad, stressful events may worsen kids' asthma

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By Joene Hendry

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - When asthma and symptoms of depression coexist in kids, asthma may become worse, study findings suggest.

Researchers studied the breathing patterns of 90 asthmatic 7- to 17-year-old boys and girls before and after they watched scenes from the movie ET: The Extraterrestrial. Half of the kids had symptoms of depression, in addition to asthma, while the other half did not.

The children with both asthma and symptoms of depression were more likely to show greater airway resistance after watching troubling scenes from the movie, Dr. Bruce D. Miller, at State University of New York at Buffalo, and colleagues found.

Airway resistance, an indicator of worsening asthma, is akin to "blowing through a straw with a narrow opening," as opposed to a larger opening, Miller explained in a telephone interview with Reuters Health.

The asthmatic kids with symptoms of depression consistently showed breathing patterns indicative of worsening asthma after watching distressing scenes in the movie. Distressed breathing was most pronounced during scenes of family distress, loss, and death.

By contrast, Miller's team reports in the Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, breathing patterns "considered typical and adaptive in response to emotional stress," among kids without symptoms of depression.

Miller cautions parents of children with asthma to be aware of the possibility that stressful or emotionally troubling events may lead to worsening asthma episodes.

SOURCE: Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, July 2009.

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