

Integrative Approaches to Lung Health

Research highlights from the American Thoracic Society 2026 Conference

June 2026 · Orlando, FL · ATS 2026

Dear members, this edition brings you some of the most encouraging research shared at ATS 2026 — exploring how mind-body practices, traditional physical therapies, and natural products may complement conventional care for chronic lung disease. As always, please speak with your care team before starting any new practice.

MIND-BODY PRACTICE

Yoga & Lung Disease

Yoga has been practiced worldwide for over 5,000 years. Modern practice centers on three components: **pranayama** (breathing), **asanas** (poses), and **dhayana** (meditation). Pranayama in particular has attracted growing research attention in chronic airways disease.

COPD

Asthma

IPF

Cystic Fibrosis

COPD — six-study meta-analysis

Individuals undergoing yoga training showed improvement in the 6-minute walk test (6MWT) and FEV1 compared to controls.

Asthma — fifteen-study meta-analysis

Similar positive findings in functional and symptom outcomes were observed across a broader asthma dataset.

Cystic Fibrosis — YOGA-CF Trial (planned)

A multi-site study is in planning to assess CF symptom scores and lung function following 12 weeks of yoga training.

YES-IPF Study (Kadura et al, n=60)

A 12-week yoga program for IPF patients showed meaningful improvement in symptoms and cough scores, though no change was seen in FVC. Encouraging early evidence for quality-of-life benefit in this population.

MIND-BODY PRACTICE

Tai Chi & Music Therapy

What is Tai Chi?

Often described as "meditation in motion," tai chi combines slow, deliberate movement with mindful awareness and has been studied in COPD and cystic fibrosis.

Polkey et al (2018) — COPD

Tai chi was compared to pulmonary rehabilitation in 120 COPD subjects and found to be equivalent in symptom relief and 6MWT outcomes.

CFCATS-2 Study (2018) — Cystic Fibrosis

Integrative Approaches to Lung Health

Research highlights from the American Thoracic Society 2026 Conference

June 2026 · Orlando, FL · ATS 2026

Forty CF adults and children completed 3 months of tai chi; participants reported improvements in sleep quality, cough, and breathlessness.

Music Therapy — Wind Instruments & Singing

Music therapy has emerged as a modern mind-body approach. Playing wind instruments or singing has been studied therapeutically in chronic lung disease.

Sinovia Study (2025) & Conga et al (2015)

Singing improved quality-of-life metrics in both COPD and ILD patients (Sinovia, 2025). In moderate-to-severe COPD, combining music therapy with pulmonary rehab outperformed rehab alone for dyspnea, fatigue, and depression (Conga et al, 2015).

TRADITIONAL PHYSICAL THERAPY

Acupuncture

An ancient Chinese practice developed approximately 2,500 years ago, acupuncture places fine needles at specific acupoints to improve the flow of chi through meridians. Growing evidence supports its use alongside conventional respiratory care.

Li et al (2025) — Multicenter RCT

Patients receiving add-on acupuncture showed improvement in 6MWT, quality-of-life metrics, and dyspnea scores compared to drug treatment alone.

Choi et al — Asthma

Four weeks of acupuncture led to meaningful improvements in quality of life and dyspnea scores in asthma patients.

Lung Cancer & Chemotherapy (Xi et al, 2022)

A meta-analysis showed acupuncture improved quality-of-life, nausea/vomiting, and fatigue in lung cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy.

ILD Studies

Two small studies in China were conducted in ILD subjects; results are not yet reported.

Mechanism Insight

Some research associates acupuncture with reduced inflammation — including effects on IL-17 and adaptive immune response. Variability in study design across the literature has limited broader conclusions.

NATURAL PRODUCTS

Herbal Medicine

Integrative Approaches to Lung Health

Research highlights from the American Thoracic Society 2026 Conference

June 2026 · Orlando, FL · ATS 2026

Two major traditions of plant-based medicine have been studied in respiratory disease: Chinese herbal medicine (often prepared as teas, sometimes alongside acupuncture) and Ayurvedic medicine from India.

Chinese Herbal Medicine — COPD

Multiple studies — some combining herbs with acupuncture — have demonstrated symptom improvement, most notably in dyspnea, in COPD subjects.

2005 JACI Trial — Severe Asthma

Herbal treatment was found comparable to steroids for asthma control. Several studies have also examined the anti-inflammatory mechanisms of herbal medications.

Ayurvedic Medicine

A 5,000-year-old Indian tradition emphasizing plant-based, symptom-focused care. Vasaka, tulsi, and turmeric are commonly used in patients with chronic lung disease — though published clinical trial data remain limited at this time.

Keep your lungs strong and your spirits high!

