

Be careful when using garlic to treat childhood ailments

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Parents and practitioners should know more about garlic before using it to treat children, according to a review of data conducted in part by the University of Alberta.

While using garlic to treat children for various ailments appears to be generally safe, more research needs to be done on its specific effects, and garlic is not recommended in at least one treatment, researchers found after reviewing several studies that used the plant to treat several childhood ailments. Their findings were published recently in *Pediatrics in Review*.

"Data are insufficient to recommend precise dosages when treating children," said Dr. Sunita Vohra, an associate professor of pediatrics at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada. Despite its longtime use in many cultures for its purported pharmacologic benefits, further research will help answer questions surrounding garlic's use in children, Vohra noted.

The data review revealed that garlic tablets did appear to aid upper respiratory tract infections, resulting in a 1.7-fold reduction in morbidity compared with placebo and 2.4-fold reduction versus dibazole, a commercial parasiticide containing medication. Garlic applied briefly to warts also proved effective with resolution reported in all children after three to nine weeks of treatment.

A naturopathic eardrop preparation of garlic and three other herbs was

as effective as a conventional eardrop with proven pain-relieving effects for treating pain associated with ear infections in children. However, it was unknown how much the garlic itself contributed to the pain relief.

There were no significant improvements when using garlic to treat cardiovascular disease in youngsters, and more study is needed to explore the plant's effects on blood pressure and lipid concentrations in children at cardiovascular risk.

As with conventional medical treatments, there is potential for adverse effects with garlic use, Vohra said. Adverse effects of garlic described in adult and pediatric studies were generally minor, with garlic's pungent smell on both the breath and body being the most commonly reported, but the most serious adverse effect of garlic was associated with topical use. Three pediatric studies reported second-degree burns when raw, crushed garlic was directly applied to children's skin as an antipyretic or antiviral treatment. Vohra cautions parents against applying garlic directly to the skin as a topical medication.

Source: University of Alberta

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