

Honey a sweet treatment for kids' night-time cough

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Given before bedtime, study found this home remedy improved symptoms of common cold.

(HealthDay) -- Instead of reaching for a commercial medicine when your child is coughing through the night because of a common cold, Israeli researchers suggest giving honey a try.

A teaspoon or two of honey before bedtime can safely relieve the symptoms of an upper [respiratory tract infection](#), they report.

"The cough due to a viral [[upper respiratory infection](#)] is generally a self-limited disease," said study author Dr. Herman Avner Cohen, chairman of the Pediatric Community Ambulatory Care Clinic with Clalit Health Services in Petah-Tikva, Israel.

"However, parents often [want] some active intervention," Cohen said. This often leads to the use of over-the-counter cough medications, which

are potentially dangerous because of the possibility of accidental overdose, he said.

For this reason, "honey may be a preferable treatment for the cough and sleep difficulty associated with childhood [upper [respiratory infection](#)]," said Cohen, who also hails from Sackler Faculty of Medicine at Israel's Tel-Aviv University.

"In light of our study, honey can be considered an effective and safe alternative, at least for those children over 1 year of age," he said.

Cohen's investigation, funded by the Israel Ambulatory Pediatric Association, the Materna Infant Nutrition Research Institute and the (for-profit) Honey Board of Israel, is published online Aug. 6 and in the September print issue of *Pediatrics*.

The authors pointed out that honey has long been appreciated for its [antioxidant properties](#), derived from vitamin C and flavonoids among other sources. It is also known for its antimicrobial potential.

Some researchers have suggested that the proximity of the nerve fibers that control coughing with the [nerve fibers](#) that control sweetness may empower sweet substances with a natural ability to suppress coughing.

Still others believe the syrupy thickness of honey, alongside its ability to cause salivation (and thereby throat lubrication), are key characteristics that might explain its potential as an anti-coughing intervention.

To test honey's therapeutic potential, Cohen and his colleagues focused on 300 children between the ages of 1 and 5, all of whom had been diagnosed with upper respiratory infections.

The children, who were brought in to one of six pediatric clinics in

Israel, had been ill for seven days or less and all suffered from night-time coughing and runny noses. None had signs of asthma or pneumonia.

The children were randomly given one of four possible treatments a half hour before bed: roughly two teaspoons of eucalyptus honey, citrus honey or libiatae honey, or an extract that tasted and looked like honey but contained none.

Based on parents' responses to a survey completed the day before treatment and the day after, the research team found that while all the children showed improvement in terms of sleep quality and coughing severity, those who received honey fared significantly better than those who consumed the non-honey extract.

The authors thereby concluded that honey might be a "preferable treatment" to relieve the kinds of symptoms that typify childhood upper respiratory infection.

As an expert on the subject of honey as a potential treatment for respiratory infection, Dr. Ian Paul, a professor of pediatrics at Penn State College of Medicine, was not surprised by the findings.

"My study in 2007 was the first paper ever to show that honey was an effective alternative to over-the-counter cold and cough medicines," he noted. "In fact, we found that honey was the best treatment and provided the most relief."

The bottom line for parents is that the common medicines that many families use are "not very effective, if at all, and there's potential for side effects," said Paul, who is also a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics' committee on drugs. "Whereas [honey](#) for children over the age of 1 is both safe and highly effective."

More information: For more on upper respiratory infections, visit the [U.S. National Institutes of Health](#).

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