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Health Issues

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Coughs and Colds: Medicines or Home Remedies?

Medicines

Over-the-counter (OTC) cough and cold medicines can cause serious side effects in young children. The risks of using these medicines outweigh any benefits from reducing symptoms. Therefore, in October 2008, the Food and Drug Administration recommended that OTC cough and cold medicines never be used in children younger than 4 years. From ages 4 to 6 years, they should be used only if recommended by your child's doctor. After age 6 years, the medicines are safe to use, but follow the dosage instructions on the package. Fortunately, you can easily treat **coughs** and **colds** in young children without these nonprescription medicines.



Home Remedies

A good home remedy is safe, inexpensive, and as beneficial as OTC medicines. They are also found in nearly every home. Here is how you can treat your child's symptoms with simple but effective home remedies instead of medicines.

- 1. Runny Nose:** Just suction or blow it. And remember, when your child's nose runs like a faucet, it's getting rid of viruses. Antihistamines (eg, **Benadryl**) do not help the average cold. However, they are useful and approved if the runny nose is caused by nasal allergies (**hay fever**).
- 2. Blocked Nose:** Use nasal washes.
 - Use saline nose spray or drops to loosen up dried mucus, followed by blowing or suctioning the nose. If these are not available, warm water will work fine.
 - Instill 2 to 3 drops in each nostril. Do one side at a time. Then suction or blow. **Teens** can just splash warm water into their nose. Repeat nasal washes until the return is clear.
 - Do nasal washes whenever your child can't breathe through the nose. For **infants** on a bottle or breast, use nose drops before feedings.
 - Saline nose drops and sprays are available in all pharmacies without a prescription. To make your own, add ½ teaspoon (2 mL) of table salt to 1 cup (8 oz or 240 mL) of warm tap water.
 - Sticky, Stubborn Mucus:** Remove with a wet cotton swab.
 - Medicines:** There is no medicine that can remove dried mucus or pus from the nose.
- 3. Coughing:** Use homemade cough medicines.
 - For Children 3 Months to 1 Year of Age:** Give warm, clear fluids (eg, warm water, apple juice). Dosage is 1 to 3 teaspoons (5 to 15 mL) 4 times per day when coughing. Avoid honey because it can cause infantile botulism. If your child is younger than 3 months, see your child's doctor.
 - For Children 1 Year and Older:** Use HONEY, ½ to 1 teaspoon (2 to 5 mL), as needed. It thins secretions and loosens the cough. (If honey is not available, you can use corn syrup.) Recent research has shown that honey is better than drugstore cough syrups at reducing the frequency and severity of nighttime coughing.
 - For Children 6 Years and Older:** Use COUGH DROPS to coat the irritated throat. (If cough drops are not available, you can use hard candy.)
 - Coughing Spasms:** Expose your child to warm mist from a shower.
- 4. Fluids:** Help your child drink plenty of fluids. Staying well hydrated thins the body's secretions, making it easier to cough and blow the nose.
- 5. Humidity:** If the air in your home is dry, use a humidifier. Moist air keeps nasal mucus from drying up and lubricates the airway. Running a warm shower for a while can also help humidify the air.

Treatment Is Not Always Needed

- If symptoms aren't bothering your child, they don't need medicine or home remedies. Many children with a cough or nasal congestion are happy, play normally, and sleep peacefully.
- Only treat symptoms if they cause discomfort, interrupt sleep, or really bother your child (eg, a hacking cough).
- Because **fevers** are beneficial, only treat them if they slow your child down or cause some discomfort. That doesn't usually occur until your child's temperature reaches 102°F (39°C) or higher.
- **Acetaminophen** (eg, Tylenol) or **ibuprofen** (eg, Advil, Motrin) can be safely used in these instances to treat fever or pain.

Summary:

If treatment is needed for coughs and colds, home remedies may work better than medicines.

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Source [My Child Is Sick! Expert Advice for Managing Common Illnesses and Injuries \(Copyright © 2011 Barton D. Schmitt, MD, FAAP\)](#)

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