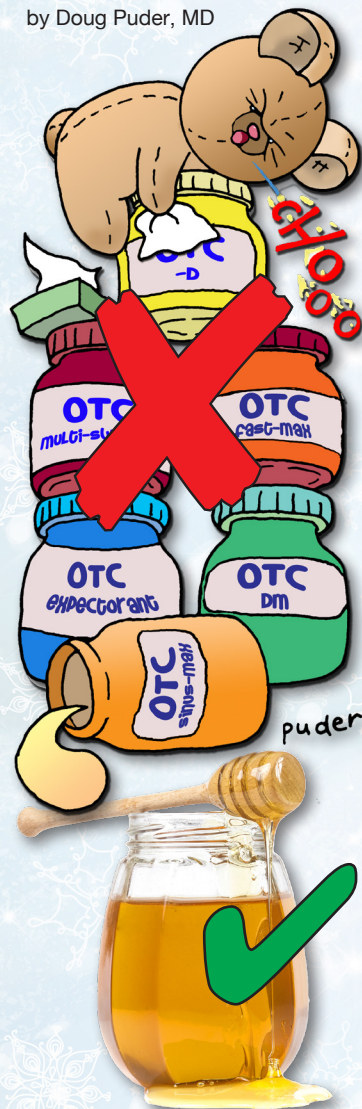


What helps children with winter viruses?

by Doug Puder, MD



Like Flu, COVID, RSV and the common cold?

We hope your office visit (or *TeleVisit*) for your child's winter cold was reassuring. So you know your child is stable and doesn't need the hospital or emergency room. They are breathing fine and drinking fluids pretty well. They are not wheezing so albuterol isn't needed. Strep throat was ruled out so antibiotics won't help. They don't need *Tamiflu* (oseltamivir) because their *flu* test was negative. But really, is there *anything* we can do to help them?

What can make sick children more comfortable?

We encourage acetaminophen (*tylenol*) every 4 hours or ibuprofen (*motrin* or *advil*) every 6 hours if needed for fever or aches. You can give both if you need to. We like saline nosedrops (don't be afraid to use 5 or more drops in each nostril and suction after). A room humidifier and some steam in the shower. can help

So why not try the OTC (over-the-counter) cold meds?

Because they have side effects and they can't be shown to work in any study. When these various OTC medications were tested against a teaspoon of honey, the honey won! Avoid "multi-symptom" products as children may receive the wrong *acetaminophen* dose.

The FDA has already taken a number of OTC medications off the market such as *phenylpropanolamine* and *ephedrine*. *Pseudoephedrine* (*Sudafed* and any product ending with xxx-**D**) can raise blood pressure. *Mucinex* (*Guaifenesin*) is advertised as an expectorant but has not been shown to be effective. The *FDA* recommends that OTC cough and cold medicines should "**not be given to children under 6 years old because of lack of effectiveness and potential for side effects**". So don't be fooled by all the advertising!

What about a bit o' Honey?

We are not pushing honey, but it can give some relief. **Honey cannot be given to infants under age 12 months** (for risk of botulism), or those with allergy to bees. A teaspoon of honey at bedtime helped coughs more than OTC cough remedies. Why would honey work? It's soothing, tastes good, contains antioxidants.

Really!? Vitamin C, Zinc, Eldeberry don't work?

While too little *vitamin C* causes a disease called scurvy, high dose *vitamin C* doesn't make illness milder or shorter. Studies show no benefit from *zinc* or *eldeberry* either. Long term *zinc* use can lead to copper deficiency. *Eldeberry* has antioxidants but can be poisonous (cyanide) if not thoroughly cooked. Sure, a glass of juice or fruit, but no megavitamins!

What About Chicken Soup or Hot Tea?

Chicken soup did help soothe kids in research studies. It helped nasal congestion and had a mild anti-inflammatory effect. (My grandma made the best chicken soup, just sayin'!) Hot tea helped to thin mucus and ensure proper hydration of the body. Green and black teas are filled with flavonoids, which are potent antioxidants. Good if kids like it, but don't force them.

