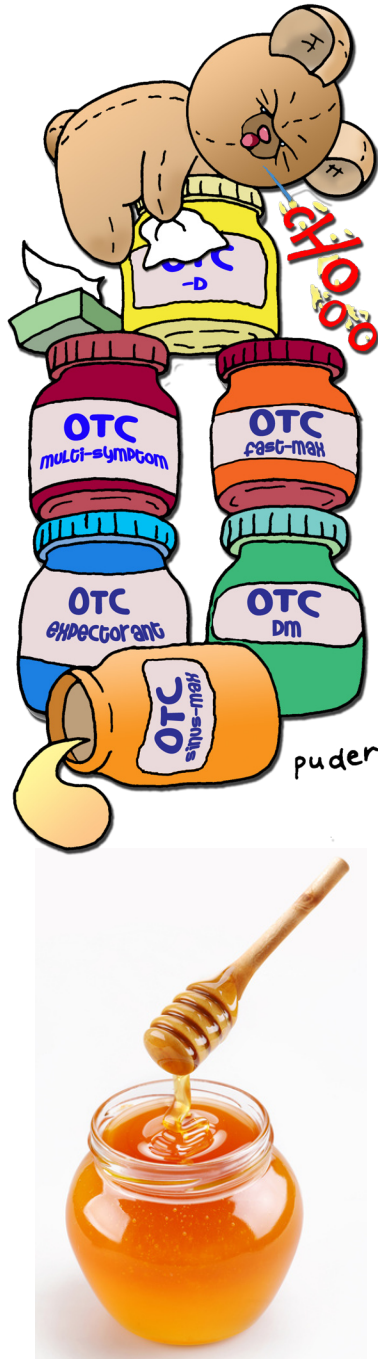




by Doug Puder, MD



A TEASPOON OF HONEY?

Really? You can't come up with anything for my child's runny nose and cough?

Well, once we have completed a careful exam of your child to rule out any serious cause of cough and congestion, we may be telling you that your child has a common virus or "cold". We listen for wheezing or pneumonia, we look for ear or sinus infections, we may rule out strep throat. Yes, we have effective prescriptions for those problems. In some situations we think about allergy causing cough and congestion, and we have very effective treatments for that.

But we have no cure the common cold. We recommend plain acetaminophen or ibuprofen for fever or aches, saline nosedrops, a humidifier or steam in the shower, but we know only time will make cold symptoms to go away.

So why not try the OTC (over-the-counter) cold medications we see advertised? 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!

The FDA has already taken a number of OTC medications off the market such as *phenylpropanolamine* and *ephedrine*. *Pseudo-ephedrine* (*Sudafed* and any product ending with *-D*) could follow. An FDA advisory board recommends that OTC cough and cold medicines "not be given to children under 6 years old because of lack of effectiveness and potential for side effects".

What about honey? It was used as the placebo in several studies, so we are not pushing honey, but it did give some relief. **Honey cannot be given to infants under age 12 months** as it could cause infant botulism. Those with allergy to bees should also avoid it.

The families of children given a teaspoon of honey at bedtime were reported to have the best improvements in coughing, beating *dextromethorphan* and *guaifenesin* (*mucinex*) the most common OTC cough remedies. Why would honey work? It's soothing, tastes good, contains antioxidants. And it's a lot cheaper than OTC products!



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