**Honey improved URI-related cough symptoms in children**

Cohen HA. *Pediatrics*. 2012;30:1-7.

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A spoonful of sugar may make the medicine go down, but a spoonful of honey before bed may help children with a cough sleep through the night, according to findings in a recently published study.

See Also

* [Youngest infants at increased risk for RSV-related ...](http://www.healio.com/pediatrics/respiratory-infections/news/online/%7B73ebdf47-9035-43b8-b5c0-56e595586e02%7D/youngest-infants-at-increased-risk-for-rsv-related-hospitalization)
* [M. pneumoniae IgM higher in children with asthma](http://www.healio.com/pediatrics/respiratory-infections/news/online/%7B36ce6460-961c-4d34-83db-d98f88daf351%7D/m-pneumoniae-igm-higher-in-children-with-asthma)
* [Otitis-prone children may fail to develop protective antibody ...](http://www.healio.com/pediatrics/respiratory-infections/news/online/%7B7361ea03-2564-4b3d-88ee-abbc6414f618%7D/otitis-prone-children-may-fail-to-develop-protective-antibody-levels)

**Herman Avner Cohen, MD**, of the Pediatric Ambulatory Community Clinic in Petach Tikva, Israel, and colleagues randomly assigned 300 children aged 1 to 5 years to either a single 10-g dose of eucalyptus honey, citrus honey, labiatae honey or placebo about 30 minutes before going to bed. The researchers then followed up with the children’s parents through a survey to measure symptoms. All of the children in the study had upper respiratory tract infections, defined by the presence of cough and rhinorrhea for at least 7 days.

Sleep scores and cough scores showed improvement in all of the treatment groups of children, but they were more pronounced in the honey group.

The researchers said although honey may not be safe in infants, “in light of this study, honey can be considered an effective and safe treatment of children greater than 1 year of age.” The researchers also wrote that honey use can be a good alternative to over-the-counter cough and cold medications, adding “we believe that educational campaigns to decrease the use of OTC cough and cold medications in children need to be increased.”

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**Perspective**

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**William T. Gerson**

* Mary Poppins had it only partially correct. While lyrics in the children’s classic describe a teaspoon of sugar enabling the medicine to go down, the movie cartoon interlude during the song playfully depicts bees at work gathering nectar from flowers. It turns out that honey itself is the medicine – at least for cough in children caused by URIs.

Many of us in practice have been recommending honey for coughs in children older than aged 1 year (concerns over infant botulism precludes its use in infants) for some time. Small studies over the past decade have shown potential benefit on cough frequency and sleep, and the WHO has also recommended its use. Pared with real concerns over potential side effects of OTC cough and cold products, the suggestion of honey as a treatment has bloomed, despite the lack of convincing supportive data.

The current study by Cohen and colleagues from Israel provides convincing evidence of the efficacy of honey on childhood cough from common URIs. Utilizing community practices in a double-blinded, randomized, placebo-controlled prospective trial, honey was found to improve nocturnal cough severity, frequency and bothersome nature as well as improving patient and parental sleep. Three different types of honey were compared and all were efficacious and significantly better than placebo. Only one dose (10 g) on one night was studied.

Cough from URI is common, uncomfortable, frustrating and a leading cause of office visits, phone calls and parental anxiety. Loss of sleep and parental work days are not insignificant issues. Honey appears safe, well-tolerated and effective. Many would like more data on its use over the course of an illness rather than just a single dose study; however, I suspect that the Cohen study will further increase the utilization of honey for childhood coughs.

Mary Poppins is undoubtedly happy and if she were to review the study would simply respond - “supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.”

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  + *Infectious Diseases in Children Editorial Board*
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