



Cough and Cold Remedies for Children

Several years ago, the FDA changed its labeling for cough and cold medications for kids. For decades a lot of the standard OTC cough and cold remedies had been “grandfathered” in for approval for children without having demonstrated safety and efficacy. Much of the data that had been used for adults for OTC cough medications had been extrapolated down to children and infants. When the FDA policies changed, this required changes in labeling for dosage and age groups.

While many of the OTC cough and cold remedies are generally considered “safe” for use in younger children, a great deal of them have really not been shown to be effective at reducing symptoms or decreasing the length of illness in younger children. For example, for children over 1 year of age, honey (either given straight up or diluted in warm water) is actually more effective than many OTC cough suppressants. Thus for children aged 1 to 6 years, using honey or Zarbees, which is an OTC preparation with honey in it, may be your best bet. (Don’t give honey to a child under 1 year of age.)

For kids between 2 and 6 years of age, you can try OTC cold relief medication such as Delsym, Mucinex, Pediacare or Robitussin, etc. I generally recommend picking an OTC medication that targets the symptoms that you are trying to address (such as cough or congestion). If inclined, you may try these on a case by case basis. See if it helps your child rest and get a good night sleep. If it doesn’t do much, or if the medication seems to have side effects, then don’t use it again (or at least until your child is older).

Keep in mind that OTC medications are really “symptomatic relief”. There is nothing therapeutic about them. However, if your child gets a good night sleep, then most likely, they will recover more quickly.

For people of all ages, the first line of treatment for upper respiratory infections is really humidified air, saline nose drops or spray and elevation of the head of the bed. If the head is elevated relative to the rest of the body and the mucous is kept thin, then generally symptoms are less severe. Also keep your expectations realistic. No treatment, whether using saline

drops, etc. or OTC medications is going to make the symptoms go away completely. That takes time.

The average cold lingers for about 10-14 days. Some resolve quicker and some take longer. In general, if the symptoms of cough and congestion are gradually improving over time, then things are heading in the right direction and the symptoms should resolve without the need for an office visit or a prescription.

--Be Well

Drew Nash, MD