

10.3_Closure

A comparison of honey and cough mixture for cough in children

A recent study by a research team from the Department of Pediatrics at Pennsylvania State University found that the treatment of coughs in children with honey can offer parents a more effective and safer alternative to the standard cough medicines in use. The research compared the effects on coughing and sleep difficulty of a small dose of buckwheat honey given before bedtime, with a honey-flavoured cough mixture containing dextromethorphan (DM), and no treatment. The 105 children who took part in the study, aged between 2 and 18, were randomly allocated to one of the three groups while in hospital.

Parents were asked to report the severity of their child's symptoms by filling in a questionnaire with five questions. They were then given a container containing either the honey, the DM mixture or nothing. Parents administered the treatment to the children overnight and the following morning the same parent answered the same five questions describing the child's symptoms again.

The measurements used for the trial were how severe and frequent the coughing was, how well the parent and child slept, and how bothersome the cough was overall. The results showed that honey consistently scored the best in terms of symptom improvement and no treatment scored the worst. There was no significant difference between the DM mixture and honey in terms of symptom relief.

The findings of this study are in line with the recommendations of a Food and Drug Administration advisory board which stated that over-the-counter cough and cold medicines should not be given to children under 6 years old because of the possible side-effects and lack of effectiveness. Potentially dangerous effects of DM in young children include severe involuntary muscle contractions and spasms. Cough is the reason for nearly 3% of all outpatient visits in the United States, more than for any other symptom.

Source: Adapted from a press release <http://live.psu.edu/story/27584> – study reference: Paul IM, Beiler J, McMonagle A, Shaffer ML, Duda L, Berlin CM. Effect of honey, dextromethorphan, and no treatment on nocturnal cough and sleep quality for coughing children and their parents. Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med. 2007 Dec;161(12):1140-1146.