

Honey may be best for cough, study finds

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

A bit of buckwheat honey beat the leading over-the-counter children's cough remedy in relieving kids' cough and as-so-called sleep troubles, a study has found. Courtesy U.K. Honey Foundation

But the research, though published in a respected medical journal, was funded by the U.S. honey industry. Its authors recommended further studies to confirm the results, while noting that safety and efficacy questions have arisen around over-the-counter kids' cough medicines.

Cough is the reason for nearly three percent of all outpatient visits in the United States, more than any other symptom, they wrote in the report. "It most commonly occurs in conjunction with an upper respiratory tract infection, and of ten disrupts sleep. The study appears in this month's issue of the Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, published by the American Medical Association. The National Honey Board, an industry-funded agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, paid for the research. The most commonly used over-the-counter children's cough remedy is dextromethorphan, though it is unapproved by the American Academy of Pediatrics or the American College of Chest Physicians, the authors noted. "In many cultures, alternative remedies such as honey are used," they added in the report. The researchers, Ian M. Paul and colleagues at Penn State College of Medicine, studied 105 children aged two to 18 with upper respiratory tract infections who were sick for a week or less and suffered symptoms at night. They were randomly assigned to receive an age-appropriate dose of honey, dextromethorphan or no treatment for one night within half an hour of bedtime. The parents were asked to fill out a survey assessing their child's cough and sleep the night before and the night after treatment. The survey analyzed cough frequency, cough severity and its bothersomeness to the child, the child's sleep and to parents' sleep. "Honey was significantly better than no treatment for cough frequency and the combined score, but dextromethorphan was not better than no treatment for any outcome," Paul and colleagues wrote. "While our findings and the absence of common primary studies supporting the use of dextromethorphan continue to question its effectiveness for the treatment of cough as-so-called with upper respiratory tract infections, we have now provided evidence supporting honey, which is generally regarded as safe for children older than one year, as an alternative," the authors concluded. "While additional studies to confirm our findings should be encouraged, each clinician should consider the findings for honey, the absence of such published findings for dextromethorphan and the potential for adverse effects and cumulative costs as-so-called with the use of dextromethorphan." In a 2004 study, Paul and colleagues found that neither dextromethorphan nor diphenhydramine, another common component of cold medications, performed better than a placebo at reducing nighttime cough or improving sleep quality. Some cultures have used honey for centuries to treat upper respiratory infections like cough, and it is considered safe for children over a year old, the researchers said. Honey soothes on contact, they added, and contributes to wound healing, possibly through its well-established antimicrobial and antioxidant effects.

Courtesy JAMA and Archives Journals and World Science staff

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