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SORE THROAT SOOTHERS

Natural Remedies Help Kids Heal

by Kathleen Barnes

The household is settling for the night when the 5-year-old cries out, “My throat hurts!” “There’s no need to panic,” says Dr.

Tieraona Low Dog, in Pecos, New Mexico, an integrative physician and chief medical officer of Weil Lifestyle. “It’s pretty easy to figure out if it’s strep throat, which requires antibiotics, or something you can treat at home.”

Only 10 to 20 percent of sore throats in children are caused by *Streptococcus* bacteria which, if not properly treated, can lead to heart damage. The first question to ask is, “What are the symptoms?” If these include sudden onset of a severe and worsening sore throat without any complaints of scratchiness; a fever of 101 degrees Fahrenheit or more; headache or stomach pain; and the lack of a stuffy nose, cough or sign of a cold—a trip to the pediatrician is essential and a course of antibiotics is necessary, says Low Dog.

The vast majority of youngsters’ sore throats, which may accompany a common cold, are caused by viruses and will heal on their own in about a week. Many natural remedies will help children feel better and relieve the pain; some cost so little they are nearly free.

SALT WATER GARGLE: “A glass of warm water with half a teaspoon of sea salt swirled into it is an old-school remedy that works well for kids at least 5 years old,” says Erika Krumbek, a naturopathic doctor and licensed primary care physician practicing pediatrics in Missoula, Montana. She notes that a salt water gargle can also moderate the symptoms of strep until the child can see a doctor.

The Mayo Clinic Book of Home Remedies confirms that the salt water draws excess fluid from inflamed throat tissues. It also loosens mucus and removes other irritants, including bacteria, allergens and fungi. Just make sure children don’t swallow the salt water, counsels Krumbek.

WARM COMPRESSES: A warm water compress using a wet hand towel

applied for 10 or 15 minutes every hour loosens mucus and is soothing. "It's amazing how effective these familiar practices are," says Krumbeck. "Grandma knew what she was doing."

LEMON JUICE AND HONEY:

"Honey is sweet, so kids love it," says certified nutritionist Kimberly Snyder, of New York and Los Angeles. This traditional recipe works because the honey has antibacterial properties and the lemon juice is packed with immune-boosting antioxidants.

Snyder cautions that babies younger than 12 months old should never be given honey because their immune systems cannot handle the bacterial spores sometimes present in the sweet treat.

ELDERBERRY: The tiny purple berries of the *Sambucus nigra L.* plant shortens the duration of colds and flu often suffered by air travelers, according to research that includes a large Australian study. Elderberry syrup appeals to kids because it tastes delicious. Low Dog recommends keeping a bottle on hand at all times because it's hard to know when a child will complain of a scratchy throat. "This yummy syrup is good for all ages. It's so safe. I love it," says Low Dog, adding, "Plus, you can always use it on whole-grain pancakes."

UNSAFE DRUGS

ACETAMINOPHEN, a popular ingredient in over-the-counter children's cold medicines like Tylenol, has been linked to twice the risk of developing asthma. Immediate side effects can include rapid heart rate and convulsions.

EPHEDRINE, PSEUDOPHEDRINE and PHENYLEPHRINE are popular ingredients in children's cold medications even though the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) says they're not effective. Side effects include the possibility of unsupervised children overdosing on the sugary concoctions and can even prove fatal. In 2008, the FDA warned parents not to use any such cold medications for children under 4.

ANTIBIOTICS are not effective against the viruses that cause most colds and flu. Antibiotics kill bacteria like those associated with strep throat, not viruses. Using antibiotics for a cold can actually lead to future antibiotic resistance.

SAGE AND ECHINACEA: Drinking sage tea and gargling with echinacea are old-time remedies for sore throats that now have scientific backing, says Snyder. Go for a twofer and add a little echinacea to the tea, she suggests.

A Swiss study showed that an echinacea/sage spray soothed sore throat symptoms just as well as a chlorhexidine/lidocaine spray, which can have side effects that include more swelling and even allergic reactions; the suggested spray should not be used with children under 12.

Pairing up a dose of safe and gentle, time-tested sore throat recipes with a big hug will go far toward relieving most little ones' suffering.

Kathleen Barnes has authored numerous natural health books, including [Food Is Medicine: 101 Prescriptions from the Garden](#). Connect at [KathleenBarnes.com](#)

Don't find fault; find a remedy.

—HENRY FORD
