



FAMIPED

Familias, Pediatras y Adolescentes en la Red. Mejores padres, mejores hijos.

Medicines for cough: not much efficient and sometimes dangerous

Autor/es: José Cristóbal Buñuel Álvarez. Pediatra de Atención Primaria. Àrea Bàsica de Salut Girona-4 (Institut Català de la Salut).

Traductor/a: Marina Puertas Martínez.

[Volumen 5. N.º1. Marzo 2012](#) [1]

What is cough? Cough is a symptom that many children present when they have a respiratory condition. In most situations, these conditions only affect the throat and the nose. For few children, this can be a sign of lung condition.

Is it very frequent? Cough is probably the most frequent symptom, together with nose mucosity and fever, why parents visit their health centre paediatricians.

Is cough dangerous? No. We need to understand that cough is part of the body response when there is a condition which affects the respiratory system, from nose to lungs. And it is a positive response since, by means of it, the body tries to "expel" respiratory secretions that contain germs that precisely create them.

But can we relieve cough with medicines? In fact, there are many medicines to treat cough or nasal mucosity. However, these medicines have not proven to be efficient to relieve cough. This will disappear gradually as the cause which creates it relieves.

It must be taken into account that many of the medicines that are sold to relieve cough are not harmless. They can have side effects in children. Some of these symptoms can be drowsiness or constipation.

Special care must be taken with babies younger than two. For them, the possibility of having side effects because of cough medicines is higher than older children.

So ... what shall parents do? As in every clinic symptom, if cough persists, the next step would be visiting a doctor so that they can determine its origin. This can be the consequence of many different illnesses even though most of them are mere colds. In a minority of situations, cough will be the consequence of a more severe illness such as bronchitis or pneumonia. In these situations, the paediatrician will prescribe the most suitable treatment.

I give a cough mixture to my son and this relieves. How come? Since in most situations cough is the consequence of a cold, its natural evolution is the spontaneous healing within seven days approximately. In this situation, the beginning of the treatment with a cough medicine can coincide with the spontaneous evolution of cold towards healing.

Therefore, which attitude should parents have against cough? Child cough is sometimes an annoying symptom for both children and parents. When this appears because of a cold it can be useful to clean the nostrils with saline solution in order to decrease mucus drops towards throat (one of the main causes of cough for children). When cough is due to a condition which affects the lungs, the paediatrician's instructions must be followed.

Medicines for cough: not much efficient and sometimes dangerous

And, above all, the best attitude which parents can show is to **keep calmness**: cough is beneficial in most of the situations. Its specific treatment cannot relieve its intensity and some medicines used for its treatment can be dangerous. Another beneficial attitude is to be patient: cough will disappear on its own in most of the situations.

There are some very useful pages, websites or articles on the Internet if you want to read more about this issue:

Asociación Española de Pediatría de Atención Primaria. Familia y Salud. How to treat cough. What to do when my child coughs. Available at: <http://www.aepap.org/familia/tos.htm> [2]

Asociación Española de Pediatría. Web "En Familia". [Medicines for cold treatment](#) [3].

Antitussive medicines for external used should not be used to treat high respiratory infections. [Evid Pediatr. 2011;7:33](#) [4].

Pediatría Basada en Pruebas. [Suppositories "for cough". bye, bye](#) [5].