



The role of cough in colds, has it got medical treatment?

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Cough is a symptom which is usual in colds, in pediatric terms, infection of the high respiratory tract. This is one of the most frequent reasons to visit a doctor since this is an unpleasant symptom which can affect children's and parents' quality of life because it changes their night sleep and everyday activities. In order to control it, a wide number of medicines are used (many people use them) although their efficiency, safety and doses are not clearly established for children.

What is cough and what is it for?

Cough is a mechanism of respiratory tract which takes place when, after a common or more intense inspiration, air is expelled and a peculiar sound is produced. It is triggered by the existence of mucus in a part of the respiratory system and it is a defense mechanism to keep the respiratory tract clean and open.

It is not an illness in itself and it does not mean that a child has a problem.

How many types of cough can take place in colds?

There can be many types of cough in respiratory infections depending on the area of the respiratory tract which is affected due to the action of invading agents and to the evolution of the illness. If the infection takes place in nose and pharynx, cough will cause irritation (itch) and if the larynx is affected, cough will be deeper (whooping cough). At the beginning of the infection, cough is dry and when mucus begins to appear, cough becomes softer and spit appears. This makes possible to eliminate phlegm because of coughing even though in the first years of life, children do not know to spit and swallow mucus.

Has cough got medical treatment in colds?

As cough is just a symptom, the cause which produces it must be treated to control it. When this is a respiratory infection of the high tract (normally a virus), there is no specific treatment and cough will diminish as the effect of

the illness is lower too, it can last for 10-14 days. As it is a defense mechanism, the elimination of cough can not be right since it may cause further problems as pneumonia or otitis.

Furthermore, there is no evidence to claim that medicines used to relieve cough in children, and in adults, are efficient and the proper doses is not known. However, it has been proved that to use them in children can have negative consequences and these are more negative if the child is younger. Since these medicines are sold without prescription, there can be more mistakes in doses and in accidents.

Hence, in order to relieve cough in children, it is not advised to use cough medicine, expectorants, histamine antagonists and decongestants since the risks are higher than the benefits produced by their use. There are some efficient measures such as nose washing with saline solution or humidity. Simple cough medicine (and not a mixture of medicines) can be used in children over 5 years old if they suffer from cough and a cold which do not allow them to sleep and rest. The proper dose must be given before going to sleep and just the necessary time to relieve unpleasant symptoms. We must not forget that there could be secondary effects after this.

Mi child coughs and has a cold, when do I visit the pediatrician?

- If the child is younger than 1, visit your pediatrician within the first three days of the beginning of cough, specially in cold months (November-March).
- If the child has problem to breathe.
- If the child has fever which lasts for more than 72 hours.
- If pain is experience as well as physical decay.
- If cough does not diminish after some days or is intense

and makes difficult everyday life activities (sleep, eat, school)

- If mucus appear and it lasts more than 10-14 days.
- If your common sense thinks it is right to (or you have any query).

Worthwhile Internet documents:

In Spanish:

Medicine for cough and cold: <http://www.sepexpal.org/farmacos-para-tos-y-catarro/>.

Safety and efficiency of medicine for cough and cold: <http://www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org/pdfs/factsheets/ColdMedicineSp0308.pdf>

Medicine for acute cough in children and adults (translated revision) In: La Biblioteca Cochrane Plus. Número 4. Available in: <http://www.update-software.com/BCP/>

In English:

Official statement of the American Academy of Pediatrics about medicine for cough and cold: http://www.aap.org/publiced/BR_Infections.htm