



Honey may ease nighttime coughing in kids

By Genevra Pittman

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - A spoonful of honey before bed may help little kids with a cough - and their parents - sleep through the night, a new study suggests.

Parents also reported that after giving honey to kids, their coughing was less frequent and less severe.

Coughs are one of the most common reasons kids go to the doctor, said Dr. Ian Paul, a pediatrician from Pennsylvania State University in Hershey.

But, he said, "The therapies for cough and cold symptoms... have problems in that they're not very effective, or not effective at all, and they have the potential for side effects."

Many over-the-counter cough and cold products have a "do not use" warning for kids under four. One of the concerns with the medications is parents accidentally giving kids too much, or kids getting into the drugs themselves.

"As opposed to many of the other things we give - medications and medicines that do have side effects - honey over age one is almost completely safe," Paul, who wasn't involved in the new study, told Reuters Health.

Researchers from Israel randomly assigned 300 kids, aged one to five, to one of four different nighttime cough treatments. Half an hour before bedtime, parents gave their children 10 grams of one of three types of honey - including eucalyptus and citrus-based honey - or syrup made from dates that was also sweet but honey-free.

In written and telephone surveys, parents reported their kids' cough symptoms and how well both they and their kids slept the night youngsters took a spoonful of honey or date extract as well as how well they had slept the night before. Parents rated each of the symptoms on a 7-point scale.

On average, parents initially gave their kids' cough frequency and severity and sleep problems a rating of between 3 and 4. That improved in all groups the night after the sweet treatment was given - but to a larger extent in kids who took honey.

Cough symptoms and sleep scores fell by 2 points, on average, in kids who ate honey, compared to a 1-point drop after a spoonful of date extract.

Parents also slept better the night after their kids' honey treatment, Dr. Herman Avner Cohen of Tel Aviv University and his colleagues reported Monday in Pediatrics.

Their study was co-funded by the Honey Board of Israel.

According to Paul, there are a couple of different explanations for why honey might help ease kids' cough.

"Honey is very rich in antioxidants, so that may have some role in fighting whatever infection is causing the cold symptoms," he suggested.

Cohen and his colleagues noted that different types of honey may contain different antioxidants - including vitamin C and flavonoids - and that darker honey tends to have more.

In addition, "There's something about having a thick, viscous, sweet liquid that provides some sort of relief," Paul said. Sweet liquid also causes salivation, he explained, which can thin mucus and lubricate the upper airway.

Paul said parents shouldn't give honey to babies, but that otherwise it's "worth a try" for little kids' coughs.