

healthy kids by jane eklund

coping with

cactus throat

Natural remedies for sore throats

For many kids, coming down with a sore throat is a matter of “when” and not “if” this time of year. But prepared parents can use natural methods to help reduce the length and severity of the symptoms—which means everyone will be less miserable.

Parents will feel better knowing that most sore throats will resolve on their own with rest and TLC. (But if you suspect a bacterial infection such as strep, ask your child’s healthcare practitioner to take a throat culture.) There are many natural ways to soothe most sore throats. Start with the basics: Be sure your child gets plenty of rest and hydration. Serve comforting foods like warm broth, herbal tea with honey, or cooling fruit-juice pops. Then consider trying one or more of these remedies.

Soothe the Scratchiness

Deliver zinc and vitamin C directly to the scene of the inflammation via sugar-free lozenges that can be chewed or allowed to dissolve in the mouth. Another option is vitamin- and mineral-infused lollipops. A recent review of research on zinc found that—if taken within 24 hours of the first symptoms—this essential mineral can shorten colds by a day or more in addition to lessening the severity of symptoms. Research shows that regular intake of vitamin C can also help shorten the duration of symptoms. Because they can be a choking hazard for very young children, give lozenges only to kids age five and older.

Make sure that your child is getting enough vitamin D. A recent study shows that people with the lowest levels of this vitamin were 40 percent more likely to contract a cold or come down with the flu.

Dry air can irritate a scratchy throat. Use a humidifier to keep the air in your house moist and breathable. For children who are able, gargling with a saltwater solution (mix one teaspoon of salt in a glass of warm water) will soothe a raw throat and reduce inflammation.

A spoonful of elderberry syrup soothes on the way down and then works to restore health. The syrup, which is high in quercetin and vitamin C, boosts the immune system, inhibits viruses, reduces mucous secretions, and may reduce swelling in the throat.

The Right Remedies

Children with sore throats should avoid foods that produce phlegm, such as dairy products and fried foods. Have kids sip hot water mixed with cinnamon, honey, and lemon juice to help decrease mucus. Herbal teas mixed with honey and lemon and served warm—not hot—are suitable for children. Echinacea works best when taken at the first sign of a cold. It should not be used as an everyday herb.

For a sore throat remedy that’s tasty as well as healing, incorporate garlic into your child’s meals. Garlic contains a healing compound called allicin—considered one of nature’s most potent antibiotics. The herb’s antibacterial and antiviral qualities will help fight off sore throats as well as related colds and influenza. Add garlic toward the end of your cooking process so the herb’s antimicrobial compounds don’t get destroyed by the heat. **TFL**

SELECTED SOURCES “**For Cold Virus, Zinc May Edge Out Even Chicken Soup**” by Tara Parker-Pope, *New York Times*, 2/15/11 n “**Forget C, D May Be the Vitamin for Cold and Flu Protection: Study**” by Stephen Daniells, www.nutraingredients.com, 2/25/09 n “**How to Boost Your Immune System with Herbs**” by Laurel Vukovic, *The Herb Companion*, 10–11/09 n “**Inhibitory Activity of a Standardized -Elderberry Liquid Extract Against Clinically Relevant Human Respiratory Bacterial Pathogens and Influenza A and B Viruses**” by C. Krawitz et al., *BMC Complement Altern Med*, 2/11