

Winter is a time of year when parents are especially confused with treating symptoms in children like a cough, runny nose, fevers, and sore throat. Is it a cold? Flu? A respiratory infection? The American Academy of Pediatrics, The ABIM foundation, and Consumer Reports Health are part of an initiative called Choosing Wisely, which can help you decide on appropriate therapies with credible and evidence based information.

Sometimes, you take the child to a doctor who prescribes an antibiotic despite the scientific evidence showing that most chest colds, sinus infections, and of course flus are caused by viruses and unless your child has a bacterial infection, that antibiotic may do more harm than good. Antibiotics carry risk, from diarrhea and vomiting, to severe allergic reactions and resistance issues, which can create the need for more expensive and stronger antibiotics in their future. Flu, colds, Sinus and ear infections usually clear up on their own but if symptoms persist, worsen, or change following proven guidelines with the your doctor regarding the use of an antibiotic or not is advised. For sore throats, obtaining a rapid strep test or culture should be performed prior to beginning antibiotics and for sinusitis, most cases are also caused by viruses and clear up without antibiotics within a week, but when your child has fevers over 102 degree for several days, a persistent cough and runny nose for two weeks, or a relapse with high fevers, seeing a doctor to diagnose a possible bacterial infection is recommended.

In most cases following these following suggestions for your child's symptoms will offer some relief and possibly shorten the duration and severity of their illness. That stuffy nose is best treated with saline (saltwater) lavages and a vaporizer which should be cleaned daily to avoid contamination Cough can be treated with a 1/2tsp of honey daily (I recommend local when possible) in children 1-5 years of age and 1tsp daily in children 6-11. Do not give honey to children under 1 year of age. Fevers can be treated with Tylenol only (Acetaminophen-generic ok) if less than 6 months of age and with Acetaminophen or Ibuprofen (Advil/Motrin) after 6 months of age. Do not use aspirin in children as it can cause a severe or fatal reaction. The Flu vaccine should be given to children after 6 months of age along with family members and adult caretakers. It is very safe and protects children effectively. Avoidance of OTC (over the counter) cold preparations for children under 4 is also recommended as many of these preparations contain multiple ingredients including acetaminophen which causes many parents to increase the dosing unknowingly. Finally, if your doctor prescribes antibiotics for a bacterial infection, finish the entire course prescribed to prevent recurrence and resistance.

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