

Practical Preventable Medicine



The Barking Cough of Croup

In ancient times in the Anglo-Saxon heritage, croup was a word meaning 'to cry aloud' and indeed not much sleep happens a household when your child has croup. It a very common viral infection, that covers a range of disorders that commonly effects the upper larynx and trachea It can range from noisy and annoying to quite frightening as severe episodes can leave the child breathless or some difficulty breathing.

The characteristic sound of croup comes from the narrowing of the effected upper airways and is usually a viral infection so antibiotics are not required.

Chinese Medicine views croup as the child's lungs and immune system being too weak to expel the invading bug, combined with the onset of cold weather (late autumn and early winter are most common) constricting the child's upper airways to ward off the cold air. Consequently if your child is prone to croup make sure they rug up against the cold, make sure they are well tucked in and use beanies and scarves if you go out. Avoid going out at night and as the sun goes down and make sure you house is dry and draft free but not too hot as dry heat can irritate the lungs setting off a coughing episode. This is why a humidifier can be beneficial.

The Chinese herb Astragalus (Huang Qi) has in recent trials been shown to have significant anti-viral properties and immune boosting ones too. This herb is also now in the old tonic Hypol (Cherry flavoured variety) that also contains cod fish liver oil that is very high in vitamin A and D which is beneficial for the immune system and is advisable to give to all prone children in winter as a preventative.

Once you have croup, most cough mixes don't work and I advise you seek a natural health professional for herbs or try the Pi Pa Lou Chinese cough mix which opens up the lungs and sooths coughs, not supresses. Some herbal preparations have anti-viral properties so they can help. Vitamin C and Echinacea may be useful, as is sage, elderflower or hyssop tea. Hot lemon drinks (with real lemons and honey) and rub chests and backs with a vapour rub morning and night. Redipred may be prescribed if your child has a severe form of croup or is having difficulties breathing and can be important to alleviate wheezing. If you are worried about breathing difficulties, seek medical advice but keep calm and encourage gentle shallow breathing.

Until next time

Written by: Dr Angela Palmer - Kinglake Chinese Medicine
Chinese Medicine CMRBV REG AH/1347
Member AACMA 2154

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Stay well

Dr Angela Palmer

Registered Chinese Medicine practitioner.

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