

Croup and Your Child

What is croup?

Croup is an infection that causes the trachea (windpipe) and larynx (voice box) to swell. It is usually part of a cold.

Croup causes a fever, hoarseness and a barking, hacking cough. It also may cause a crowing noise (called stridor) when the child breathes in through the narrowed wind pipe. Croup usually lasts 5 to 6 days. Symptoms may be worse at night. Croup symptoms most commonly occur in children 1 to 3 years old.

What should I do if my child has croup?

Most children with mild croup can be treated at home. You should make your child as comfortable as possible. Make sure that your child gets plenty of rest and plenty to drink.

When your child has a croupy cough, it is very important to increase the amount of liquids that your child drinks. Cough medicines are generally not recommended. You may give your child acetaminophen (brand names: Children's Tylenol, Infant's Tylenol) for his or her chest discomfort or discomfort due to fever.

If your child has a mild attack of stridor, try having him or her breathe moist air. This is called mist treatment. You can give your child a mist treatment at home in 1 of 2 ways:

1. Have your child breathe through a warm, wet washcloth placed over the nose and mouth.
2. Run hot water in your shower with the bathroom door closed. Once the room has become steamy or has fogged up, sit with your child in the room for about 10 minutes. Sometimes it helps to take your child outdoors for 10 minutes or for a drive in the car.

When should I call the doctor?

Most children with croup will get better with treatment at home. But some will need treatment in the hospital. Watch your child closely and call your doctor if:

- Your child starts drooling or has trouble swallowing.
- Your child's lips and skin are bluish or turn dark.
- Your child's breathing doesn't sound better after mist treatment.
- Your child is cranky or is constantly uncomfortable.
- Your child's breathing becomes more difficult.
- Your child seems to feel worse.
- You are worried.

Artwork by Becky Slemmons.

This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

Visit familydoctor.org for more useful information on this and many other health-related topics.

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