

natural cold and flu fighters

When coughing, sniffles, and fever take over your house, be ready with these simple soothers.

by [Marygrace Taylor](#)



COUGH

Home remedy: Warm herbal brews, like chamomile and rooibos tea, provide quick comfort for children over 6 months with painful coughs, says KIWI contributing editor and integrative pediatrician, Lawrence Rosen, M.D. For extra oomph, add a squeeze of lemon to fight bacteria, and a spoonful of soothing, throat-coating honey for kids over 12 months (skip the honey for younger children due to the risk of infant botulism).

Natural pharmacy: Homeopathic blends are micro doses of natural substances from plants, minerals, or animals used to relieve acute health conditions, like colds. A favorite of Rosen's is Boiron Children's Chestal, which loosens mucus to relieve deep chest coughs (\$7 for 4.2 ounces, [childrenschestal.com](#)). Another option: Homeolab Kids Relief Cough & Cold Syrup (\$7.50 for 3.4 ounces, [kidsrelief.com](#)).

When to call the doc: If your child is coughing up green, yellow, or blood-tinged phlegm, or if he's wheezing, has a high fever, or is having trouble breathing or swallowing, all of which could indicate an infection.

NASAL CONGESTION

Home remedy: Eucalyptus oil is a potent decongestant, and indirect exposure works best (and is safest) for kids. Sit with your child in the bathroom (door closed), and pour 1 to 2 drops of essential oil into a hot running shower. The eucalyptus-infused steam will begin clearing her nasal passages within a couple of minutes, and after 6 to 8 minutes, she should be breathing a whole lot easier, says master herbalist Jessie Hawkins, author of *The Handbook Guide to Vintage Remedies*. Also an effective option: A neti pot, a teapot-shaped device used to pour saline water into the nasal pathway to clear congestion.

Natural pharmacy: Some studies have found that elderberry syrup, a sweet, grape juice-like liquid, reduces nasal congestion and other flu-like symptoms (such as aches and pains, coughing, and mucus), with one Norwegian study even showing a 90 percent improvement in symptoms among participants. Elderberry is a good complement to the fast-acting eucalyptus oil because you can take it several times a day to shorten the duration of

a cold or flu, says Hawkins. She recommends Herbs for Kids Eldertussin Elderberry Syrup, which blends the extract with other herbal cold- and flu-fighters like chamomile and echinacea (\$11.70 for 4 ounces, [herbsforkids.com](#)). You can also try Xlear Nasal Spray (\$13.50 for 1.5 ounces, [xclear.com](#)), or Sambucol for Kids (\$13 for 4 ounces, [sambucol.com](#)).

When to call the doc: Symptoms lasting longer than 10 days, or congestion accompanied by green discharge, sinus pain, fever and trouble breathing could mean a sinus infection.

SORE THROAT

Home remedy: Just as with coughs, hot tea is one of the simplest (and most comforting!) sore throat soothers, Rosen says. You can also try having your child gargle with salt water. The salt can help ease scratchy throats, and it may work as an antibacterial to prevent upper respiratory tract infections as well.

Natural pharmacy: Relieve sore throats with Traditional Medicinals Just For Kids Organic Throat Coat tea, a blend of plant-based throat soothers includ-

ing marshmallow root and wild cherry bark (\$5.50 for 18 teabags, *traditionalmedicinals.com*). Or try slippery elm bark, an herb that forms a slick coating on the throat when mixed with water or saliva, says Hawkins. She recommends Thayers Slippery Elm Bark Lozenges (\$12.50 for 150 lozenges, *thayers.com*).

When to call the doc: Difficulty breathing and being unable to swallow (excess drooling in babies and toddlers is a sign of swallowing problems) could indicate strep throat.

FEVER

Home remedy: Staying hydrated is a key part of recovery since fever can cause dehydration, says Rosen. Offer room-temperature water or chamomile tea. Warm beverages won't further increase your child's body temperature, and kids tend to like them better than ice cold drinks. (If your baby is under 6 months, check with her doctor before giving water or liquids other than breastmilk or formula.) You can also try making ice pops with 100 percent fruit juice or herbal teas. If your child complains that she feels too hot, dabbing peppermint essential oil onto her skin can provide a nice cooling sensation.

Mix a drop into a few tablespoons of olive or almond oil (which acts as a base to dilute the strong essential oil) and rub behind your child's ears, on her neck, or even on her feet (applying the oil far away from her nose and mouth will help prevent respiratory irritation). Cold socks are another option. Dunk a pair in cold water, place in the freezer for 30 minutes, then slip them on your child's feet. "Not all kids will like this, but some do, and it works well to cool them off," Rosen says. A gentler alternative is a sponge bath with towels soaked in lukewarm water.

Natural pharmacy: Coconut water provides hydration while replacing electrolytes—but without the artificial flavors or dyes that are found in conventional sports drinks. One satisfying sip: Zico Pure Premium Coconut Water (\$2.50 for 14 ounces, *zico.com*). Another hydration-helper: PediaVance Electrolyte (\$7 for 32 ounces, *naturesone.com*).

When to call the doc: The fever exceeds 103 degrees or lasts longer than three days, since this can be a sign of a serious infection. For babies under 6 months, any fever over 100 or 101 degrees warrants a call to the doctor, as fever can worsen quickly in infants. ●

Mom-tested cold and flu remedies

What natural solutions do you turn to for your family?

- "I love my immunity soup with ginger, mushrooms, and miso. We also do nasal rinses, plenty of fluids, rest, and extra hugs."

—Gina Rau, mom to Patrick (6), and Marcelana (4); Portland, Oregon

- "Elderberry syrup, local raw honey, eucalyptus oil, and vitamin D."

—Holly Gerth, mom to Russell (2); Cincinnati

- "We use California Baby essential oil blends in the kids' baths. It's great right before bed."

—Jen Whiting, mom to James (4), Olivia (2), and another on the way in February; Edwardsville, Illinois

- "Peppermint tea with honey and lemon juice, plus lots of water and plenty of rest."

—Kellie Burton, mom to Elliott (16), Caden (9), and Max (7); Millersville, Maryland