

## **CROUP**

Croup is a virus disease that commonly afflicts children in the 2-5 year old range. Although it is most prevalent during the fall and spring, it may occur at anytime of the year. Croup is typically caused by the 'para-influenza' virus so many of the child's symptoms are similar to those caused by the influenza, or 'flu' virus, such as fever, aches, pains, fatigue, runny nose, and cough. The virus in this case also causes some swelling and soreness to the voice box and windpipes, creating the hoarseness and seal-like bark of croup. Sometimes the swelling to the air passages is enough that the child has difficulty breathing in. This is always cause for concern and, to make matters worse, most of symptoms of croup seem to be worse at night.

True croup may have crouping symptoms of one to three nights, followed by typical cold symptoms for a week or so. Since it is caused by a virus, true croup is not helped by antibiotics unless a secondary infection occurs, such as an ear infection.

The treatment for croup consists of general treatment as for 'flu' symptoms. Give Advil, Motrin, or Tylenol for fever, aches, and pains. Give plenty of clear liquids, soups, and popsicles, and run a vaporizer in the child's room. A cough and cold medicine may be recommended or prescribed for your child to decrease some of the worst coughing, but don't expect these to totally eliminate the cough. Occasionally, the doctor will prescribe a short course of steroid medication to decrease the throat swelling associated with a severe case of croup, but medical experts are divided as to whether this is truly helpful.

For those times when croup causes difficulty breathing, two common techniques may be used to help. First, sit with your child in the bathroom with the door closed. Run the shower at full hot steam and read a story or play quietly as your child breathes in the hot steam vapors for 15-20 minutes. If this doesn't relieve the breathing difficulty, bundle up and go for a walk in the cool night air with your child for about 15 minutes or so.

If neither of the above tricks help with the breathing difficulties, or if your child seems to be in serious distress, proceed directly to the nearest emergency room. Roll down the windows of the car so that the cool night air may help on the way in.

Realize that not all 'croupy coughs' are croup. Some episodes are just coughing through mucous, some might be due to such things as asthma, and some could be to an inhaled foreign body. Have your child examined if you are not sure. As always, call us with any questions.