

[IMAGE]

Cough Medicine Results Sickening

Doctors often recommend over-the-counter cough medicine to treat this frustrating symptom of the common cold. Cough medicine sales are rising: In the United Kingdom (U.K.), sales rose 3% between 1998 and 1999. Believe it or not, this type of medicine has gained widespread support despite evidence that it really works. The results of a recent study in the *British Medical Journal* may surprise you.

To determine whether over-the-counter cough medicines are effective for treating acute cough, the authors of the review searched all studies in the U.K. involving adults with cough for less than three weeks who were administered cough medicine. All studies included placebo groups or no-medicine groups for comparison to the group taking medicine. Fifteen studies involving 2,000 individuals were assessed.

In nine (60%) of the studies, cough medication was deemed "no better than placebo" for treating a cough. In the remaining six studies, the positive results "were of questionable clinical relevance." This was true for multiple forms of medication: antihistamines, antitussives, expectorants, decongestants, and combinations of these types of drugs.

Given the amount of over-the-counter cough medicines available, one would think they possessed some effectiveness. This paper counters such "conventional" thinking. Over-the-counter cough medicines for acute cough may be ineffective for reducing symptoms. Talk to your doctor about other options for treating cough and cold symptoms, and also remember that when it comes to sickness, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Reference:

Schroeder K, Fahey T. Systematic review of randomised [sic] controlled trials of over-the-counter cough medicines for acute cough in adults. *British Medical Journal* 2002;324, pp. 329-331.

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