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CROUP

Croup is a viral infection of the upper airway that tends to have an *abrupt onset in the middle of the night*, often occurring when the weather cools. Croup is commonly benign (despite how bad the symptoms may sound), but can be serious on rare occasion. Children with croup usually develop a hoarse, “barking” cough, and/or stridor, the noisy breathing associated with *inspiration of air*. A fever may be present as well.

Croup typically lasts two-to-three days, and sometimes a more generalized ‘cold’ develops (with a significantly less impressive cough) lasting a week or more. Just like with many viral respiratory infections, some children develop ear infections days after croup symptoms first appear.

If your child has croup, you can do the following three things to relieve the severity of it:

- 1) Raise the head of the bed.** Swelling around the vocal cords is responsible for the stridor. Upright positioning decreases the swelling to some degree.
- 2) Provide cool, humid air.** Add humidity to the air with a cool mist vaporizer and cool the room by opening the window.
- 3) If symptoms progress,** bring your child into a **steamy bathroom** by running a hot shower. If that strategy is unsuccessful, most children respond favorably by being dressed appropriately and **taken outdoors**. (Consider a ride in the stroller or drive with an open window in the car.)

Fever causing discomfort can be managed with acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen, such as Advil® or Motrin® (see our *fever* sheet).

Encourage fluids, especially clear, cool liquids such, Pedialyte® or the equivalent. (Your child will likely be disinterested in eating.) Cough syrups *will not* help croup.

Try to remain calm and keep your child calm. Some children become restless or frightened when their breathing is difficult. The more frightened a child becomes, the harder it is to breathe. If you are upset and excited, your child will sense it. We are more concerned with how a child with croup *looks* than with how he or she *sounds*. On occasion, we will recommend that your child be treated with steroids.

Please call us if your child:

- cannot breathe when lying down
- drools a lot and has difficulty swallowing
- is breathing rapidly (more than 40 times a minute)
- has a deeply sunken chest with each breath
- is unable to be calmed by you
- turns blue, especially around the lips
- is not drinking any fluids, for any reason
- has a fever that is unresponsive to ibuprofen or acetaminophen in the proper doses
- causes you to have any other urgent concerns