A remarkable new study looking at natural alternatives to medications found that compared to a systemic steroid, a combination of honey and coffee was superior in reducing symptoms associated with a post-infectious cough (PPC).

PPC is a cough that remains after a common cold or an upper respiratory tract infection for more than three weeks, and in some cases as long as several months. Conventional treatment may involve any number of powerful drugs, many of which have serious side effects, including codeine and dextromethorphan (so-called centrally acting antitussives), antihistamines, narcotics, and bronchodilators.

The new study, published in Primary Care Respiratory Journal, was conducted by researchers at Baqiyatallah University Hospital, Tehran, Iran from 2008 to 2011.[i] 97 patients who had experienced PPC for more than three weeks were randomized in double-blinded fashion into three groups:

1. A jam like paste was prepared which consisted of 20.8 grams of honey plus 2.9 grams of instant coffee for the first group ('HC').
2. 13.3 mg of prednisolone for the second group (steroid, 'S').
3. 25 mg of guaifenesin for the third group (control, 'C').

The researchers described the patient treatment protocol as follows:

"The participants were told to dissolve a specified amount of their product in warm water and to drink the solution every eight hours for one week. All the participants were evaluated before treatment and one week after completion of treatment to measure the severity of their cough. The main outcome measure was the mean cough frequency before and after one week's treatment calculated by a validated visual analogue cough questionnaire score."

The results of the study are summarized in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>HC group</th>
<th>S group</th>
<th>C group</th>
<th>p Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (years):</td>
<td>42.3 (13.2)</td>
<td>36.1 (11.9)</td>
<td>42.0 (11.8)</td>
<td>0.103 (NS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight (kg):</td>
<td>76.1 (12.9)</td>
<td>77.1 (8.8)</td>
<td>73.9 (9.9)</td>
<td>0.534 (NS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of illness (months):</td>
<td>3.0 (2.9)</td>
<td>2.9 (1.5)</td>
<td>2.9 (2.7)</td>
<td>0.973 (NS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of cough (degree):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before treatment</td>
<td>2.9 (0.3)</td>
<td>3.0 (0.0)</td>
<td>2.8 (0.4)</td>
<td>0.082 (NS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After treatment</td>
<td>0.2 (0.5)</td>
<td>2.4 (0.6)</td>
<td>2.7 (0.5)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001 (S)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C=control, HC=honey plus coffee, S=steroid. (NS)=not significant, (S)=significant.
Coffee Honey Beats Prednisone

As you can see by the table above (previous page), the honey-coffee group saw their degree of cough frequency decrease from 2.9 before treatment to 0.2 after treatment, whereas the prednisolone group decreased only from 3.0 before treatment to 2.4 after treatment.

The details are as follows:

RESULTS: There were 97 adult patients (55 men) enrolled in this study with the mean of age of 40.1 years. The mean (+/- SD) cough scores pre- and post-treatment were: HC group 2.9 (0.3) pre-treatment and 0.2 (0.5) post-treatment (p < 0.001); steroid ('S') group 3.0 (0.0) pre-treatment and 2.4 (0.6) post-treatment (p < 0.05); control ('C') group 2.8 (0.4) pre-treatment and 2.7 (0.5) post-treatment (p > 0.05). Analysis of variance showed a significant difference between the mean cough frequency before and after treatment in the HC group versus the S group (p< 0.001). Honey plus coffee was found to be the most effective treatment modality for PPC. [emphasis added]

The researchers reflected on the implications of their findings:

"Each year, billions of dollars are spent on controlling and trying to cure cough while the real effect of cough medicines is not quite reliable. Even though PPC is reported to account for only 11–25% of all cases of chronic cough and it is not associated with disability and mortality, it can cause morbidity and is responsible for medical costs...

Honey and coffee are natural edible substances that are safe, agreeable, less expensive than medicines, and easily available. Moreover, they have proved to be effective in a short period of time."

Given the relative safety and superior effectiveness of honey plus coffee versus prednisolone, this study adds to a growing body of biomedical research indicating that natural substances, including spices, vitamins and foods, are often superior in efficacy to synthetic drugs while often maintaining far higher levels of safety relative to them.


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He founded Greenmedinfo.com in 2008 in order to provide the world an open access, evidence-based resource supporting natural and integrative modalities. It is widely recognized as the most widely referenced health resource of its kind.