

Croup

Croup is a viral infection of the larynx (voice box) and upper portions of the respiratory tract. The barking cough, hoarseness, and noisy breathing are caused by swelling and inflammation of the larynx. Most of the time, the illness is caused by a virus and antibiotics will not help.

Usually croup affects children between the ages of three months to five years. Often the child will have one to two days of runny nose, low grade fever, and some hoarseness before the barking cough appears. Typically, the child awakens in the middle of the night with cough, rapid noisy breathing, and fever.

Croup is a scary experience for both the parents and the child. Fortunately, relief is easily obtained and most cases can be managed at home. Try to appear calm and reassuring. Cool, moist air often relieves the harsh noisy breathing and barking cough. Therefore, take your child for a walk in the cool night air for about 20 minutes. If your child has improved but remains croupy, then try warm steam for relief. Make your bathroom into a steam room by closing the bathroom door and turning the shower on hot. Sit with your child in the steamy room for another 20 minutes (take some toys or books for entertainment). Most symptoms will be relieved by either or both of these simple procedures. Acetaminophen or Ibuprofen may be used to decrease fever and discomfort. Give your child plenty of fluids, and use a cool mist vaporizer in his room at night. You should call our office if the simple measures described above have not brought significant improvement within 30 - 60 minutes.

Croup may last a week. The worst nights are the first and second ones after the barking cough develops - expect a few trips to the shower room or walks in the night air on these nights. Fever may last three to five days and the cough may continue intermittently up to 10 days. Your child often seems a lot better during the day.