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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Effect of Honey on the Common Cold

The common cold is a viral illness that affects persons of all ages (1) and is associated with rhinorrhea and nasal obstruction (2). Conventional therapies for colds and flu focus primarily on temporary symptom relief and include over-the-counter antipyretics, anti-inflammatories, and decongestants (3). In some studies, honey has been recommended as a preferable treatment for cough and sleep difficulty in children, which are due to upper respiratory tract infection (4). On the other hand, in Iran, since ancient times some people have used honey as an alternative medicine for relief of common cold symptoms. Therefore, we conducted this study to evaluate the effect of honey on common cold symptoms in Jahrom, a city in Iran. Sixty volunteers with signs and symptoms of common cold were included in the study protocol and divided into two groups. Patients were selected consecutively and were age and gender matched in both groups. All selected patients had developed cold signs and symptoms 24 h or less before arriving at the medical center. After that, in the first group 30 patients were treated by classic therapeutic regimen (acetaminophen 325 mg/q 6 h + naproxen 250 mg/q 12 h + chlorpheniramin 4 mg/q 6 h) (5). In the second group, the other 30 patients were treated according to the previously mentioned regimen plus 50 g natural honey daily. Patients were visited each day by one of our study investigators to check signs and symptoms (rhinitis, muscle pain, fever, throat congestion, cough and sneezing). Study investigators who checked patients' signs and symptoms were unaware about the prescribed regimen. Treatment continued until signs and symptoms ended. SPSS software was used for data analysis. We compared the duration of signs and symptoms in two groups by t test; p value <0.05 was accepted as significant. Twenty (33%) of the studied patients were male and the other 40 (67%) were female. In each group, 10 patients were male and the other 20 patients were female.

Mean age of patients in the first group was 27.4 ± 6.2 years and in the second group 24.4 ± 7.4 years with no significant differences between groups ($p = 0.1$). We found a significant difference in duration of all signs and symptoms between groups. In the group given honey, duration of signs and symptoms was 1–2 days less than control group.

Honey has well established antioxidant and antimicrobial effects. It contains phenolic acid, flavonoids and peroxidase; therefore, its antimicrobial effects may be due to these substances (6–15). In our study, duration of all signs and symptoms of the common cold decreased significantly with the use of honey. Therefore, further studies should be done with this substance, with dose elevation and more precise laboratory analyses.

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