

CHILDREN WITH A COUGH STERIOD INHALERS

A treatment at risk of being overused, as indicated by the Associazione Culturale Pediatri

Infections of the upper respiratory tract (nose, mouth, pharynx and larynx) are the most frequent illnesses in children. They are almost always caused by a seasonal flu virus and heal on their own within a week or a little more. Particularly in winter, newborns are the most affected by the viruses. Colds, sore throats, phlegm and coughs often occur frequently and rather quickly and take weeks to pass, much to the desperation of new mothers. The persistent cough and associated requests for treatment are the most common reasons for telephone consultations and paediatric visits. In these situations, the paediatrician very often prescribes "an inhaler with a bit of cortisone".

WHY IT IS BETTER NOT TO USE ONE

There is no proof that corticosteroid inhalers are effective in treating a cough. On the contrary, it has been demonstrated that using them does not shorten the duration of symptoms due to acute inflammation of the upper respiratory tract. Nonetheless, according to data by "Osservatorio ARNO bambini" (a continuous surveillance system regarding doctor's prescriptions in the national healthcare system), corticosteroid inhalers are among the top 15 medications prescribed in Italy. The names of the active substances on market are Beclometasone,

Budesonide, Flunisolide and Fluticasone. One child in four uses them at least once a year. Beclometasone, in fact, is the third most prescribed medication for Italian children. It is estimated that every year at least 18% of pre-school aged children use it, which is three times more than in other European countries. This says a lot about overprescription in our country.



WHEN IT SHOULD INSTEAD BE TAKEN

Corticosteroid inhalers have the capacity to quickly reduce swelling and inflammation. They are therefore essential medications in some circumstance and truly indispensable for the treatment of the following few, well-defined conditions: asthma attacks, chronic asthma and acute laryngotracheobronchitis, also called croup.

BETTER TO USE A SPACER

Once it is established that it is truly necessary for a child to take a corticosteroid, it is very important that it is measured and administered correctly. In fact, with an inhaler, a good part of the nebulized medication dissipates before it gets into the throat.

In this case, not only does the medication miss the target, but it can cause problems like hoarseness and thrush, a fungal infection that requires specific medications for treatment.

The best solution to address the problem is to use spacers. They are available in various dimensions according to the child's age. Spacers are absolutely preferred over the inhaler because they increase the efficiency of the therapy and reduce side-effects. Regardless of the chosen method, the mouth should always be rinsed after using corticosteroids.

To learn more: "Inverno a tutto vapore", Test Salute 113, December 2014 (in Italian) on www.altroconsumo.it in "magazine archive". Project "Doing more does not mean doing better - Choosing Wisely Italy" www.slowmedicine.it www.choosingwiselyitaly.org

THERE ARE VALID ALTERNATIVES ADVICE FROM ALTROCONSUMO



➤ In the case of a cold or sore throat, some traditional methods are unquestionably valuable. Keep the child's nose clean so that he/she will not breathe through the mouth, increasing the risk of a cough due to throat irritation. Drinking water or warm beverages with honey on a regular basis is an excellent therapy.

➤ Use corticosteroid inhalers only upon medical instruction and only for situations where its efficiency has been proven.

➤ Frequently open the windows of the residence, even in winter, to reduce the concentrations of microbes and irritating substances. Do not over-heat the surroundings and counter the dryness caused by radiators by humidifying the air.

➤ Do not smoke because exposing children to cigarette smoke increases the irritation of the respiratory tract.

➤ Remember that a sore throat and cold are illnesses that pass by themselves and accelerating their course is unlikely.