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home remedies

Most complaints from your pint-size patient can be soothed without a trip to the doctor. Get a healthy dose of *quick cures*.

Cuts and scrapes fall neatly into two categories: those that need a kiss and those that need stitches. Your child's headache or stomachache, however, are more confusing, especially when "I don't feel good" is really a case of "I don't want to go to school." So how do you approach simple ailments without panicking? Follow the advice of the medical experts here, who weighed in on common conditions that can be treated by Dr. Mom before calling in a real doctor should symptoms persist. The prescription for a stomachache may be prune juice. Not exactly a spoonful of sugar, but she *will* be on time for kindergarten.

written by
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photographs by
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.... headache

the cure: Give your child the recommended dosage of pain reliever and have her nap. Or apply a cool, damp washcloth to her forehead. For prevention, make sure school-age kids get about 10 hours of sleep (teens need nine). And add lean protein, like turkey, to meals and snacks. An overload of sweets, especially in the morning, can cause what Tanya Remer Altmann, a pediatrician in Westlake Village, California, calls "Pop-Tart headaches." If your daughter's head starts to hurt midday, "she could be squinting to see the chalkboard and might need glasses," says Altmann. When to worry: If your child has a high fever (over 101 degrees) or a stiff neck with the headache, is vomiting, or wakes in the night with head pain, see your pediatrician to rule out dangerous viruses, like meningitis.

nosebleed

the cure: Moisten a cotton ball with a pediatric-strength nasal-decongestant spray (such as Neo-Synephrine) and place it just inside your child's nostril, recommends Roya Mansouri, an ear, nose, and throat specialist in Portland, Oregon. The spray constricts blood vessels to help stop bleeding. Have her lean slightly forward and squeeze the nostrils shut for 5 to 10 minutes.

when to worry: If it lasts more than 20 minutes, call a pediatrician. Doctors can cauterize blood vessels to stop the bleeding and determine if there's a more serious underlying cause.

sore throat

the cure: For a garden-variety sore throat, give your child a numbing children's throat medication (like Kids Chloraseptic spray or liquid) for immediate relief, followed by children's ibuprofen to reduce inflammation.

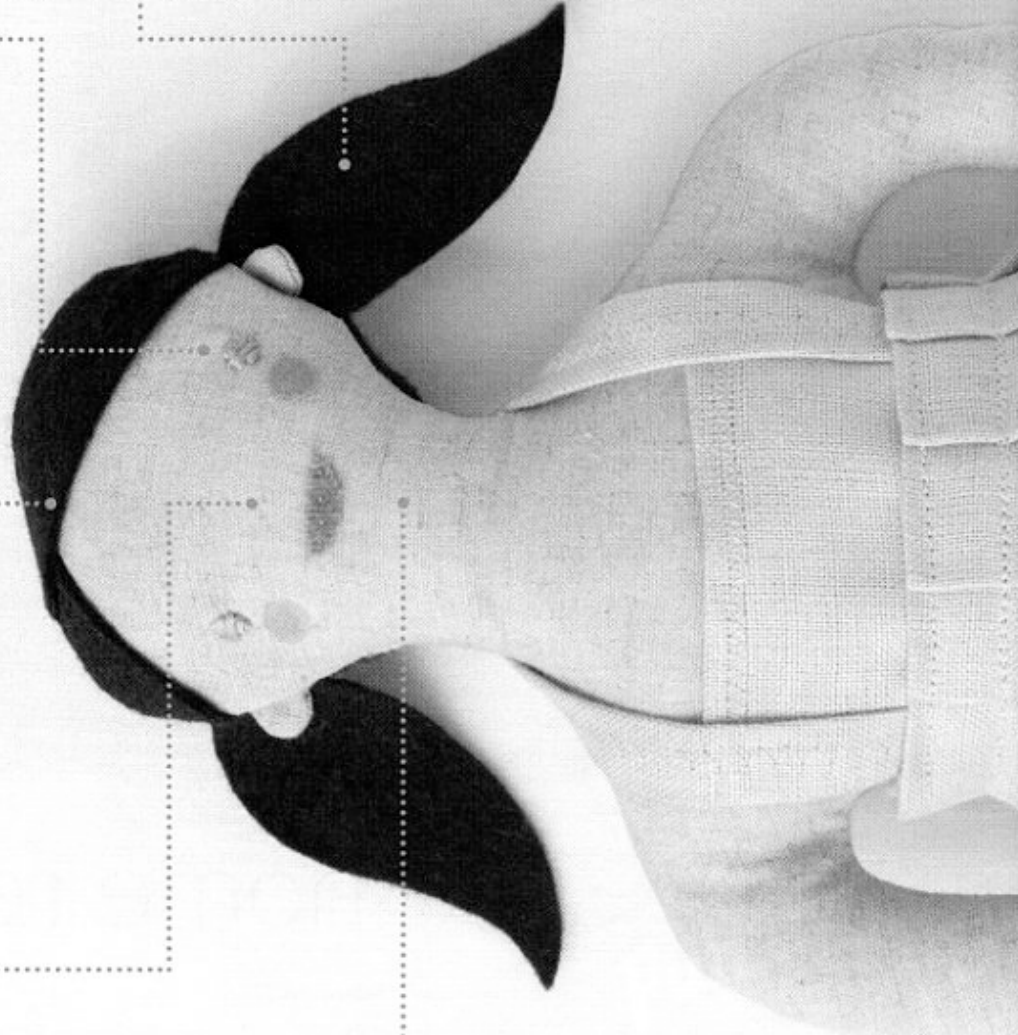
when to worry: If you suspect strep throat, visit your pediatrician. Strep usually comes on quickly and fiercely, typically without accompanying cold symptoms, says Jennifer Shu, a pediatrician in Atlanta. Your pediatrician can do a strep test in her office and tell you within minutes whether your child is infected.

.... irritated eyes

the cure: Time, usually. The red, itchy eyes of a cold often disappear with the virus, says Lisa Fiascone, a pediatric nurse practitioner at Scituate Pediatrics, in Scituate, Massachusetts. If your child is rubbing his eyes but seems well, it may be allergies. Try over-the-counter eyedrops. When to worry: If the whites of your child's eyes turn bright red and there is green or yellow discharge, he may have pink eye. See a doctor.

head lice

the cure: Store-bought lice shampoos (like Rid and Nix) work well. If there are any remaining nits (white eggs that cling to strands of hair), remove them with the special comb included in the lice kit, says Andrew Spooner, a pediatrician at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. Some of Spooner's patients have also had success coating the hair with Cetaphil liquid cleanser, blow-drying the hair, and leaving the treatment on for eight hours to suffocate the lice. Repeat again in a week. Wash your child's bedding, hats, coats, and other recently worn clothing in hot water and dry on high heat to kill the lice. Put pillows and toys in large plastic bags and keep them tightly closed for two weeks. Also check everyone in the family. When to worry: If over-the-counter cures don't nix the lice, ask a doctor for a prescription shampoo.



stomachache

the cure: If there are no other symptoms, such as vomiting, that could indicate a stomach virus, you might need to get her bowels moving. Try one prune or a four-ounce glass of prune juice. (Pears also work.) If the ache is due to nerves or food, try saltine crackers, which can soothe an upset stomach.

when to worry: If constipation is continuous, your doctor may prescribe a laxative. If your child wakes at night with a fever and a stomach pain that moves to the lower-right part of her abdomen, it could be appendicitis. Immediately take her to the ER or contact your pediatrician.

skin rash

the cure: If your child doesn't have any symptoms of having a virus, give him a dose of Benadryl (¼ teaspoon for every six pounds of body weight, up to four times a day) and draw a bath with an anti-itch product (such as Aveeno Soothing Bath Treatment). Then, armed with photos of the rash, see your pediatrician to determine whether it could be an allergic reaction or eczema.

when to worry: If he also has swelling, trouble swallowing or breathing, or unusual drowsiness, head to the ER. He could be experiencing anaphylactic shock from an allergic reaction. Also contact your doctor whenever a rash oozes.

splinter

the cure: Numb the area with ice. Wipe the skin with isopropyl alcohol, then use tweezers to remove the splinter at its entry point. Use a sterilized needle to open the skin slightly if you can't easily reach the splinter. Finish by dabbing with an antibiotic ointment. If the splinter is under a fingernail, let your doctor remove it.

when to worry: Only if the splinter site is red and swollen, which indicates it may be infected. Let a doctor check it out in that case.

growing pains

the cure: Gently massage your child's legs, offer a hot-water bottle or a heating pad (turn it off before she falls asleep), and give her a dose of children's pain reliever. The pain usually subsides within 30 minutes.

when to worry: Rarely. If your child injured her leg during the day or you notice swelling, apply an ice pack to the sore area instead of heat. In rare cases, constant leg pain can be a symptom of more serious childhood disorders. See your pediatrician.