

News, trends, and fun finds

healthmatters



Supplemental *Science*

Mom has **HOMEWORK** to do

BY MICHAEL A. MILLER

When children trudged into the pediatric office of Zak Zarbock, MD, complaining of irritating coughs disrupting their sleep, he was easily able to provide a cure for the most common symptom in the country—until he wasn't.

This had nothing to do with his medicinal prowess; the FDA had recently ruled that over the counter cough and cold medicines may not be given to children younger than 6 due to potentially dangerous effects of dextromethorphan (DM) in young children, including dystonic reactions, severe involuntary muscle contractions, and spasms, according to Penn State.

In a bit of a pediatric pickle, Dr. Zarbock had to come up with an answer to bridge the treatment gap for children, which at the time was to take drugs or do nothing. A simple, wholesome answer came to him in the sweet, sticky form of dark honey, which has been shown by Penn State to alleviate cough and respiration-related symptoms better than DM ever could. In the aftermath of this revelation, Dr. Zarbock founded Zarbee's Naturals, a company that manufactures cough, cold, and immune-support remedies as naturally as possible.

We spoke with Brett Furio, the CEO of Zarbee's, on the importance of using quality ingredients backed by science. It turns out, choosing a truly natural remedy in the supplement aisle is more difficult than it sounds.

The FDA regulates dietary supplements differently than "conventional" food and drug products, disallowing supplement providers to make any health claims because "unlike drugs, supplements are not intended to treat, diagnose, prevent, or cure diseases." This makes it difficult to understand what you're buying and feel good about its ability to cure the ailment for which you bought it.

These inelastic limitations on supplement advertising put strain on both producers and consumers of dietary supplements. A common tactic for suppliers is listing ingredients and what they *may* do, while health-conscious moms and dads must conduct extra-curricular research and form their own opinions on those suggested outcomes. Furio believes this is easier for consumers when they have credible science made available at their



→ Honey, I'm Coughing

Honey has been used throughout the ages—all the way back to the time of the ancient Egyptians—in various salves, solutions, and remedies. Although honey certainly built up its resume as a trusted healer across centuries and cultures, not all honey is the same. According to research, it's specifically the dark stuff you're after, as it holds more antioxidant and antibacterial properties. "We discovered dark honeys overall contain about 8 times more antioxidants than honeys that are lighter in color," said Furio. It is this high-quality honey you'll find in Zarbee's remedies like the 99% Honey Cough Soothers.

fingertips. For this reason, Zarbee's always chooses ingredients with a long history of healing and plenty of evidence as proof.

Luckily, Furio sees a positive trend. "I think the overall macroeconomic trend is that there is a greater awareness as to what we are putting in our bodies in general, and moms, parents, and the average consumer are becoming much more [inquisitive]," he said. He even goes as far as to say this homebrewed knowledge is transforming the natural realm at large. "I mean look at Diet Coke. I was a big Diet Coke fan, and then people became more and more aware that maybe Diet Coke is not so good, and sales are struggling."

But there is still "a lot of confusion as to what is true north," admitted Furio. For example, if you're looking



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• *Some companies barely use the minimum standards to get the impact you would want from the product,” said Furio. That’s where it remains difficult for moms and dads to bring home the best for their coughing children.*

for elderberry gummies for immune support, there is going to be a litany of options that vary in color from a true, deep purple to a skimpy, light pink. “The reason is [some companies] barely use the minimum standards to get the impact you would want from the product,” said Furio. That’s where it remains difficult for moms and dads to bring home the best for their coughing children.

Then you’ll want to watch out for traps like gelatin, which is derived from animal hooves and often used in gummies as a gelling agent. The claims on the packaging of that gummy could be strikingly similar to those of the product sitting adjacent—which uses natural pectin (from apple cores) as its gelling agent. While both may be elderberry gummies, one is clearly the more natural choice.

“So I could take a vitamin that is more natural than the one next to it, which is my little guilty pleasure—I can get the right thing for my kid and my family. But is my kid all of a sudden going to be dramatically different from other kids? No. It is about the little choices you can make to live a healthier

lifestyle. I think that is a really good thing,” said Furio. Transcending the barriers of supplements, every little effort weighs into your overall well-being from what you clean the house with to the soap you wash your face with to the fertilizer you spray your lawn with.

Here are Furio’s insider tips to keep your head in the game when surfing the supplement shelves to avoid copycat products that cut corners:

→ **Ask your pharmacist or pediatrician.** There are a staggering number of natural remedies and information about them online, but Furio’s number one tip is to check with your pediatrician before trying anything new.

→ **Read the label.** What ingredients are in the supplement and where do they come from? Where is the product made? This is basic information you can glean from simply reading the label.

→ **Choose ingredients backed by science.** It’s easy to get wrapped up in the latest fad diet or ingredient, but it’s important to stick with what works. “So we are trying to find trusted and true ingredients that have been used in Mother Nature, are well known, and there is scientific evidence on,” said Furio.

→ **Do your homework.** You’re reading this magazine, so you probably have a head start on this one. “I think at the end of the day, there is information out there if you want it, and not every company is going to have the same standards as others. So just doing your research is really, really important,” said Furio.

→ **Take control of your health.** “As consumers start to think about everything they put in their bodies, on their bodies, and things they surround themselves with, whether they are lotions or chemicals and sprays they use to clean the home, or whether they are more natural things—those little things add up over time,” said Furio.

Elderberry Good For You

For ages, the elderberry plant has been instrumental in human lifestyle. Native Americans prized the plant, using the stems for arrow shafts and basketry and the berries for dyes, syrup, and dried fruit during winter. In the middle ages, elderberry was considered a holy tree capable of curing ailments and restoring health—it may not have been the golden age of medicine, but they struck some truth with elderberry. Recent research shows flavonoids in elderberry support immune function, and its high vitamin C content amplifies that effect while supplying antioxidant properties as well. Other research suggests anti-inflammatory, diuretic, and even skin-supporting benefits. Just don’t go for the red kind—they’re poisonous to humans.

Source: USDA