

FEVER

Fever is a symptom, not a disease. It is a normal physical response. The body produces fever to fight infection, both viral and bacterial. Fever is a sign that the body's immune system is turned on. The fevers that children usually get are not harmful. Most of them are caused by viral illnesses, although sometimes they are caused by bacteria. Many common infections of childhood cause fever. Teething, although blamed for many fevers, does not cause significant fever.

You have a fever when your temperature rises above its normal range. What's normal for you may be a little higher or lower than the average temperature of 98.6. Depending on what is causing the fever, additional symptoms may include: sweating, chills, headache, muscle aches, loss of appetite, general weakness.

Your child has a fever if any of the following occur:

- Rectal temperature over 100.4F
- Oral temperature over 100F
- Axillary (armpit) temperature over 99.5F

The body's average temperature is 98.6F orally, but it will fluctuate during the day usually being lower in the morning and higher in the later afternoon and evening. Mild elevation (100.4-101.3) can be caused by exercise, excessive clothing, a hot bath, or hot weather. Warm food or drink can also raise the oral temperature.

Taking a Temperature

We recommend that you take your child's temperature if you suspect that they have a fever. We suggest that you always take the temperature if you are going to give medication and write down your finding.

There are many ways to take a temperature. Glass thermometers are always accurate without batteries and are very reliable. They no longer contain mercury. Digital thermometers are easy to use and can be used in the mouth, axilla or rectum. Ear thermometers are easy, but also tend to be more inaccurate.

Hints for taking temperatures:

- To take an axillary temperature, make sure that the end is not sticking out on the other side of the armpit. Wait until the digital thermometer beeps or 3-4 minutes for a glass thermometer.
- To take a rectal temperature place a dab of petroleum jelly on the end. Lay the baby on the tummy and carefully insert it approximately one-half to one inch into the baby's rectum. Keep the baby still and wait for three minutes. This is usually an easy method to use in small infants, but as they get bigger and wiggle more, it can become more difficult and you can move to taking it under their arm.

When to contact the advice nurse/doctor

Fevers by themselves may not be a cause for alarm or a reason to call the doctor. Most fevers with a viral illness range between 101 and 104 and last for approximately three days. In general the height of the fever doesn't relate to the

seriousness of the illness. How sick your child acts is what counts. We expect them to more lethargic when they have the fever, but to become more interactive as the fever resolves. Acetaminophen and Ibuprofen are only expected to bring the fever down by approximately 2 degrees. It will come back up again within a few hours. We do not recommend that you routinely give alternating medications every four hours unless instructed to do so.

Below are listed some specific situations in which you should call for advice:

Infants

An unexplained fever is a greater cause for concern in infants and younger children. You should call the advice nurse/doctor if:

- Your child is < 1 month old with a temperature of 100.4 rectal or < 97
- Your child is younger than 3 months old with a temperature of >101
- They refuse to eat or drink
- Has a fever and seems lethargic and unresponsive

Children

Children often tolerate fevers well, although high temperatures can cause concern for parents. There is likely no cause for concern if the child is responsive (especially when the temperature is lowered) and they are drinking and playing.

You should call the advice nurse/doctor if:

- They have a fever that persists longer than three days, is getting higher or there are other concerning symptoms
- Is listless or irritable when the fever is brought down, vomits repeatedly, has a severe headache or stomachache or has other symptoms which cause significant discomfort.

Treating A Fever

We would recommend treating a fever if your child is uncomfortable. Encourage your child to drink fluids. Popsicles and cold drinks can make them feel more comfortable. Clothing should be kept to a minimum. The more bundled up they are, the higher their fever will be.

If you have a low-grade fever, it's not necessary to lower it if the child is acting fine. For temperatures below 102, do not use fever-lowering medicine unless advised by a medical professional or your child seems uncomfortable. Some experts believe that aggressively treating a fever interferes with your body's immune response. The viruses that cause fevers thrive at a normal body temperature. By producing a fever, your body is helping to eliminate the virus. Pay attention to how your child is feeling rather than being too concerned about the number.

Acetaminophen and Ibuprofen products are available over the counter. Make sure that you give the correct dosage for the child's weight and at the correct interval. Acetaminophen is done every 4-6 hours and Ibuprofen is every 6-8 hours. We do not recommend that you regularly alternate medications unless suggested to do so by a medical professional.

Home remedies:

-Drink plenty of fluids

-Rest

-Stay cool

-Take acetaminophen or ibuprofen: Use according to dosing instructions

-Soak in lukewarm water. Taking a lukewarm bath making sure to get the child's head wet for 15-20 minutes can bring the temperature down a few degrees. Or you can also get into a lukewarm shower with your child, getting their head wet to increase evaporation. Do not use alcohol sponge baths.