

Measuring and Managing the Fever

While no one likes to have a fever, it's actually a sign that the body is working to fight off an infection.

When a child feels warm to the touch and there's no obvious explanation – such as being overdressed in a warm room – it could mean that his body is responding normally to an infection.

The normal oral temperature is usually 98.6 degrees, but the body's average temperature can fluctuate between 97 and 100.4 degrees. The child is considered to have a fever when his temperature is more than 100.4 degrees. With viral illnesses, temperatures can range from 101 to 104 degrees and last for two to three days. When a fever is present, your doctor will want to assess both the temperature and the child's overall condition – how sick he acts and feels.



Here are some things to do when your child becomes feverish:

- Give him plenty of liquids to guard against dehydration. Flavored ice pops and iced drinks are helpful.
- Offer children's acetaminophen or ibuprofen if your child is very uncomfortable, following dosing instructions carefully for your child's age and weight. **(Babies under 3 months with fever must be evaluated by the pediatrician before parents give medications.)** Never give aspirin to children; it has been linked to Reye's syndrome, a very dangerous disease.

- Cover him with a light blanket, and keep him out of cold drafts.
- Use a wash cloth wet with tepid water to help cool his forehead, but avoid making the child chilled. Do not use alcohol rubs to reduce fever; it can be absorbed into the child's bloodstream.

Remember that the fever is helping your child, so don't use fever-reducing drugs unless his temperature is more than 102 degrees and he is very uncomfortable. Even if you decide to give your child medication, his fever will go up and down until the illness runs its course. So if the child is sleeping, don't awaken him for medicines.

When your child has a fever, call your pediatrician immediately if any of the following are true:

- The child is less than 3 months of age.
- The temperature is more than 105 degrees.
- The child looks or acts very sick.

When a fever persists for 24 hours, call your pediatrician if any of the following are true:

- The child is 3 to 6 months of age.
- The temperature is between 104 and 105 degrees.
- The fever lasts for more than three days.
- The fever went away and then returned.
- The fever lasts more than 24 hours without an apparent cause.

Tips on Taking Your Child's Temperature

- A rectal thermometer is best for infants; an oral thermometer is fine for children who can hold the thermometer between the lips and under the tongue for 3 minutes.
- It is more difficult for a parent to get an accurate reading using armpit or ear sites to take a child's temperature.
- Use a digital thermometer for a correct measurement.
- Mercury thermometers should not be used.
- Instant-read temperature strips are not considered reliable or accurate, even though they are convenient and popular.

Your child's pediatrician should be your primary source of advice about your child's health.



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