Let's Talk About...

Fever

Fever is the body's natural way to fight infection. Normal body temperature is from 97° to 100°F (36.1° to 37.5°C). A fever is a temperature of more than 100.4°F (38.0°C).

The most common cause of fever in children is a minor infection like a cold. The cause could be a more serious infection. How high the fever goes does not tell how bad the infection is.

Different types of thermometers are for different parts of the body. If you think your child has a fever, take a temperature. You can do this placing a thermometer under your child's tongue, under his arm in the armpit, in his ear, or in the rectum. Make sure you use the right thermometer for area of the body. Do not use fever strips because they are not accurate.

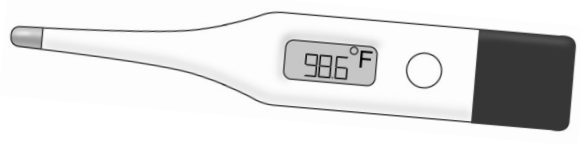
If you choose the rectal method, make sure the thermometer is for the rectum. Before you use a digital thermometer, carefully read and follow the instructions on the package insert. Never insert the thermometer tip more than ½ inch in the rectum (or as you were taught). The tip of this thermometer is more round than mouth or armpit thermometers. Also, a rectal temperature is usually one degree higher than a mouth or armpit temperature.

If your child's temperature is higher than the normal range (97°–100°F), ask yourself the following questions:

- How ill does my child seem?
- Is my child fussy?
- Is my child sleepy or does my child have no energy?

If the answer is yes to any of these, or your child seems very ill, try to reduce the fever with the methods listed in this document.

Note: If your child is younger than three months, you should always call a doctor if you think your child has a fever.



Bringing the fever down

If your child's temperature is above 100.4°F, you can use several ways to reduce the fever. The goal is to help heat leave your child's body without causing him to shiver or have goose bumps. Shivering causes the temperature to go up. You can bring a fever down in the following ways:

1. Dress your child in thin pajamas, shorts, underwear, or diapers. It is normal to want to bundle your child, but bundling will increase his temperature.
2. Cover your child with only a sheet or leave him uncovered. Do not cover with blankets until his temperature returns to normal.
3. Make sure your child's room gets lots of moving air. You can use small fans to keep air moving.
4. Encourage your child to drink lots of liquids. Your child needs liquids to replace liquids lost through the skin during a fever.

Medicines

Because fever helps the body fight infection give medicine only after your child's fever is above 101°F (38.4°C).

Do not give your child aspirin. Studies have linked aspirin with brain, liver, and kidney damage and Reye's syndrome.

The best way to bring a fever down is to give acetaminophen (a-SEAT-ah-min-oh-fen). Common brand names for acetaminophen are Tylenol®, Tempra®, Liquiprin®, and Panadol®. These drugs reduce fever and relieve pain. Antibiotics do not reduce fever or relieve pain.

Acetaminophen comes in drops, syrup, tablets that melt in the mouth, and chewable tablets. The dose (amount given) is based on your child's weight. Most bottles will have a chart with the correct dose by weight on it. It is important to know that drops are usually stronger than syrup so you do not have to use as much.

Be sure to read the directions carefully. You may give acetaminophen every four hours, but you should only give the amount recommended on the bottle. Do not give acetaminophen more than five times in twenty-four hours.

If you are unsure about the correct dose of a medicine, call your doctor.

Another medicine that will bring down a temperature is ibuprofen (eye-byu-PRO-fin). Some brand names of ibuprofen are PediaProfen® and Advil®. PediaProfen® comes in a liquid form. Advil® comes in drops, liquid, and chewable tablets. Ibuprofen is approved for children six months of age and older. Never give ibuprofen to children who are dehydrated (mouth is dry, not enough wet diapers) or vomiting all the time.

Follow the directions carefully and do not use more than the prescribed dose. You can give ibuprofen every six to eight hours. Shake the bottle well before you give a dose to your child.

Remember that a low fever (under 101°F) is not harmful itself, but a fever often makes a child feel achy, irritable, and miserable. If your child is uncomfortable, acetaminophen may help.

Complications of fevers: Seizure

Rapid temperature changes can cause seizures (convulsions). Your child may appear unconscious and his arms and legs may jerk. This may last from a few seconds to several minutes.

Place the child on his side or on his stomach with his head turned to one side. Remove anything that may be in his mouth such as a pacifier, or bottle. Do not put your fingers or anything else in his mouth! Remove any objects that are around him so he does not hit them during the seizure. Call your doctor immediately after the seizure. It is normal for your child to be sleepy after the seizure. If the seizure has not stopped after 10 minutes call the paramedics.

Mercury glass thermometers

Primary Children's Medical Center will not give out or provide information about using mercury glass thermometers. Mercury (sometimes called quicksilver) is a dangerous material. Mercury-glass thermometers are not available in stores; digital thermometers have replaced them. If you have a mercury-glass thermometer that breaks, do not touch the mercury. It is very poisonous. Use gloves and clean it up with something that you can throw away.

Do not simply throw mercury-containing or mercury- glass thermometers away in the trash, because the mercury is "hazardous waste." Call your local Household Hazardous Waste hotline or Health Department to find out how to dispose of mercury thermometers.

Call your doctor if...

- You have a newborn baby under 90 days old who develops a fever. Call immediately!
- Your child is having difficulty breathing.
- Your child has a fever above 104°F (40°C) or fever that will not go down after you give acetaminophen.
- Your child vomits (throws up) often or with unusual force.
- Your child has a seizure (see below).
- Your child has a stiff neck.

- Your child looks ill, cries constantly, seems to be in pain, or is unresponsive or too sleepy whether he has a temperature or not.
- Your child has difficulty taking fluids or there are fewer wet diapers.
- Your child has a low fever (under 101°F) for more than 48 hours, even if your child seems well.

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