

# Fever

Some people think that a high fever is bad, because it can cause brain damage. That is not true! If that were true, then we would all be brain injured because we have all had a high fever at some point in the past. The truth is that fever is one of the ways our bodies protect themselves against infections. When we have an infection in any part of the body we may produce more heat (fever). With more heat, our bodies' defenses can kill germs better. So the fever is not our enemy but our friend, it is helping the body fight the germs.

The most important question then, is not "what can I do to stop the fever?" But rather, "what is causing the fever?" We then must decide if the cause is serious or not serious. Fortunately, most of the time, the cause of the fever will be something that is not serious, such as an ear infection, throat infection, or an upper respiratory infection. On occasion there are more serious infections such as pneumonia. With pneumonia there are 3 main symptoms that are usually present including a high fever, cough, and shortness of breath.

Another serious cause of infection is meningitis. This is an infection caused by germs around the brain. Fortunately, this is a rare disease. To tell the difference between a serious infection (like meningitis) and common infections we look at the whole picture, not just a thermometer. A child may have a fever of 104 degrees and have meningitis, but he may also have a temperature of 104 degrees and have an upper respiratory tract infection such as the flu. Some important questions to ask include 1. Does he look me in the eye? 2. This he moved his head easily from side to side or does he act as if it hurts when he moves it? 3. Is he paying attention to what is going on around him? 4. When the fever breaks, does he perk up, playing smile more, or does he look even worse?

If the answers to these questions are reassuring, it may be reasonable to continue to watch. If any of these questions are answered in a concerning way, your child should be seen right away. Fortunately, meningitis is a rare disease and most children will not have it but rather something more common and less severe.

Now that we know that fever is not something to be feared, we do not have to go out of our way to bring it down. We should focus on the comfort of the patient. Sometimes when we are overly aggressive we can make the patient feel even worse such as by placing them in a luke warm bath of water which can actually be very uncomfortable. They would actually feel more comfortable under a blanket. Using Tylenol (acetaminophen) or ibuprofen can help us feel more comfortable and may be used for this purpose. If your child has a fever but continues to act well and play, there is no reason to force him to take Tylenol.