

Let's Talk About...

Fever

What is a fever?

A fever is a temperature of more than 100.4°F that occurs when the body is fighting infection. Normal body temperature is 97–100°F.

What causes a fever?

A child's fever is most often caused by a minor infection like a cold. It can also be caused by a more serious infection. A high fever does not necessarily mean your child has a more serious infection.

How should I take my child's temperature?

If you think your child has a fever, take their temperature using a thermometer. A rectal thermometer (inserted into your child's bottom) is the most accurate way to measure temperature, especially in babies. It is usually one degree higher than a mouth or armpit temperature.

To take a rectal temperature:

- Read the thermometer instructions to make sure it can be used in the rectum.
- Insert the thermometer tip no more than ½ inch into the rectum (or as a doctor instructs).

You can also take your child's temperature with a digital thermometer under their tongue or in their armpit. Read the thermometer label before using it anywhere on the body. Do not use fever strips; they are not accurate.

Note: If your child is younger than three months old and you think they have a fever, always call your child's healthcare provider first.



How do I bring my child's fever down?

If your child's temperature is above 100.4°F, you can reduce the fever by:

- Dressing your child in thin pajamas, shorts, underwear, or diapers
- Leaving your child uncovered or covering them with only a thin sheet until their temperature returns to normal
- Using small fans to make sure your child's room gets lots of moving air
- Encouraging your child to drink lots of liquids

Your goal is to help heat leave your child's body without making them shiver or have goosebumps. Shivering causes their temperature to rise.

What medicine can I use to bring my child's fever down?

A child with a fever may feel achy, irritable, and miserable. If your child is uncomfortable and has a fever higher than 101°F, you can give them:

- **Acetaminophen** (Tylenol®) every 4 hours as needed but no more than 5 times in 24 hours
- **Ibuprofen** (Advil®) every 6–8 hours as needed (for children 6 months old and older) with food

Read the directions on the bottle carefully to give your child the right amount of medicine. Never give your child aspirin. It has been linked to Reye's syndrome, a rare illness that can cause brain and liver damage.

Remember: A low-grade fever (under 101°F) is not harmful. Fever helps the body fight infection.

What if my child has a seizure during their fever?

Quick temperature changes, like fevers, can cause febrile seizures (convulsions). During a seizure, your child may appear unconscious, and their arms and legs may jerk. This may last anywhere from a few seconds to several minutes. They may also be sleepy after the seizure.

If your child has a seizure:

- Put your child on their side with their head turned to one side
- Remove anything in their mouth, like a pacifier or bottle
- Don't put your fingers or anything else inside their mouth
- Remove any objects around them so they don't hit them

Call your child's healthcare provider immediately after the seizure. If the seizure has not stopped after 5 minutes, call 911.



When should I call my child's healthcare provider?

Call your child's healthcare provider if:

- Your newborn baby (younger 90 days old) develops a fever
- Your child has a fever above 104°F
- Your child's fever does not go down after you give them acetaminophen
- Your child vomits often or with unusual force
- Your child has a seizure (see above)
- Your child has a stiff neck or won't move their neck
- Your child looks ill, cries constantly, or seems to be in pain, whether they have a fever or not
- Your child has trouble drinking fluids or has fewer wet diapers
- Your child has a low-grade fever (under 101°F) for more than 48 hours, even if they seem well

Call 911 or take your child to the emergency room if:

- They are having trouble breathing
- They are unresponsive or too sleepy

Notes

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