



Fever

What is a fever?

A fever is **positive evidence of an active immune system**. There are benefits from having a fever. A fever is not a disease.

A fever is a temperature of 100.4 degrees F (or 38.2 C) and higher. A rectal temperature is the most accurate for children under 2 months of age. An axillary (arm pit) temperature may underestimate the real temperature by a degree.

The body maintains normal body temperature using the brain, skin, muscle, and blood vessels. Changes in body temperature cause:

- An increase or decrease in sweat production.
- Blood moving closer to, or away from, the surface of the skin.
- The body to get rid of, or hold on to, water.
- Seeking a cooler or warmer environment.

When there is a fever (common causes are viruses, ear infections, sore throats, urinary tract, lung, or intestinal infections) the body reacts by resetting its thermostat to a higher temperature. Many low level viruses can be “burned out”. This is why you don’t treat a fever in the lower range unless your child is uncomfortable. You want the immune system to do its work.

Fever below 105.0 degrees F (40.6 C) does not harm the brain or the body, though it does increase the need for fluids. Even untreated, fevers rarely rise higher than 104 or 105 degrees. A small percentage of children may have seizures with fever. While the seizures may frighten parents they generally are not harmful to your child. However, your child should be checked by a physician afterwards.



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Any fever over 100.4 degrees F (38.2 C) in an infant under 3 months of age should be evaluated. Fever in older children is positive evidence of an active immune system at work fighting disease. There is no set “number” that triggers alarm. The question is “**what does your child look like/how are they behaving.**”

If your child is lethargic they should be evaluated immediately. This is a child who is not caring what goes on around him, has minimal eye contact or verbal interactions, is too weak to fuss, sit up, or walk; they may be limp.

When should a fever be treated?

Always follow dosing directions on the medication label. Use the dose dispenser that comes with that medication. Treat by weight, not age.

A fever greater than 102 degrees F (39.0 C) should be treated. If your child has a lower fever and is very uncomfortable, treating with acetaminophen may be helpful. Treating your child's fever will not help the body get rid of the infection; it simply relieves discomfort associated with fever. Fever reducers will drop the temperature down a degree or two. Not necessarily dropping to the normal range.

Administer an anti-fever medication, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen. (Ibuprofen is for children over 6 months of age.) **DO NOT give your child aspirin**, as it has been linked to a serious, potentially fatal disease, called Reye syndrome.

Other ways to reduce a fever:

- Dress lightly. Excess clothing traps body heat and causes temperature to rise.
- Offer electrolyte fluids –Pedialyte, Pedialyte popsicles. Older children can drink Gatorade, Powerade, Propel. Coconut water is unproven as an appropriate hydration fluid.



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- Give a lukewarm bath. Do not use alcohol baths.
- Place cold washcloths over areas of the body where the blood vessels are close to the surface of the skin such as the forehead, wrists, groin, and trunk. As moisture evaporates from the warm body the temperature comes down.

When should I call the doctor?

When a child's temperature reaches 105 degrees, this is considered a medical emergency and the child needs immediate medical attention, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.

In this situation, rotating cool, wet clothes can bring down the temperature in 5-10 minutes.

Call the doctor's office immediately if:

- Your child is younger than 3 months old and has a rectal temperature greater than 100.4 degrees
- your child is crying inconsolably
- your child is difficult to awaken
- your child's neck is stiff (unable to touch chin to chest)
- any purple spots are present on the skin that do not blanch when pressed
- your child is unable to swallow anything and is drooling saliva
- your child looks or acts very sick (if possible, check your child's appearance one hour after your child has taken an appropriate dose of acetaminophen)

Call the doctor for an appointment if your child:

- has had a fever more than 72 hours
- is complaining of ear or throat pain, has a severe cough
- burning or pain occurs with urination
- the fever went away for more than 24 hours and then returned
- your child has a history of febrile seizures