



MID-JERSEY PEDIATRICS

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FEVER IN INFANTS AND CHILDREN

While a healthy adults body temperature remains fairly steady at about 98.6°F the normal body temperature of infants and young children ranges anywhere from 97.1° to 100°F. depending on the time of day, the child's activity level, and the site at which the temperature is measured. As a rule, rectal temperature is one degree higher and axillary (armpit) temperature one degree lower than oral (under-the-tongue) temperature. While this rule of thumb is not always accurate a temperature over 100°-101°F usually indicates that the child has a fever.

Most fevers in children are due to viral infections. When a child is ill, the temperature may rise to 104°F or more, but the fever is usually brief. The height of the fever does not necessarily indicate the seriousness of the illness. Some children may have a minor illness and run high temperatures while others may be very sick and have little or no fever.

If however, an infant is under 2 months of age and has a temperature elevation of 100°F or higher call your doctor. At this age the infant may be more susceptible to serious infections, which must be diagnosed early.

CAUSES OF FEVER

Fever is not a disease but a symptom of an illness usually as a sign of an infection. Colds, the flu, and other viral and bacterial infections are all common causes of fever in children. *Although some parents worry that a fever may cause permanent damage, this is very rare and occurs because of the severity of the illness, and not the fever itself.* Many experts feel that temperature elevation is one of the body's defense mechanisms that enable it to fight infections more effectively.

WHEN TO TREAT A FEVER

Steps to reduce a fever need to be undertaken only when your child is uncomfortable. The child will require additional fluids during periods of fever, especially if the child is also having vomiting or diarrhea. Acetaminophen (Tylenol™, Tempra™, etc.) is recommended most often and is available without a prescription in a variety of dosage forms. Acetaminophen dosages on the bottle label should be followed by weight, not age. Suspensions should be shaken prior to use. Dosages should be measured using the dropper or cup distributed with the bottle. Do not measure infant medication by the spoonful. Your doctor may also recommend ibuprofen (Advil™, Motrin™, etc.) as treatment for fever. **Consult your doctor immediately if the fever is accompanied by persistent, forceful vomiting or by convulsions, irregular breathing, or unusual rashes.**

Dress the child lightly and keep the room temperature comfortable. If the child is very uncomfortable you may sponge with lukewarm water, **not alcohol**, as often as necessary. Occasionally, a rapid rise of temperature will cause convulsions. While a fever-associated convulsion is frightening to witness, parents should remember that it is not life threatening and is usually of short duration. In the event of a convulsion, the child should be turned on his or her side to prevent choking, and a doctor should be called. Some children are more prone to febrile convulsions than others; if the convulsions seem to recur whenever a child has fever, a medication to prevent them may be prescribed.

SUMMARY

Fever is very common in babies and young children. It is not a disease in itself but a symptom of illness, usually an infection. Most fevers require no special treatment and will resolve spontaneously or with treatment of the underlying disease. While the fever itself is not serious, it is important to identify the underlying cause. **If your child**

appears ill or the fever persists for 24 hours, call your doctor. In the case of an infant under two months of age with a fever, call your doctor immediately.