How to Handle a Fever

You hear coughing, whining, or those dreaded words, “Mommy, Daddy, I’m sick.” A hand to the forehead tells you your child is burning up. Don’t panic. If your child is sick, a fever is an indication of an active, vigilant immune system hard at work.

Although the medical community has long known that a fever is the body’s way of fighting a bacterial or viral infection, many doctors still advocate the use of pharmaceuticals to bring down a fever without thought of the consequences – the possibility of a longer illness and a greater need for medical intervention.

Recently, there appears to be a shift in thinking. More conventional healthcare sites on the internet are stating that a fever is a natural and helpful process of the immune system. But even among these enlightened professionals, their opinions vary as to how high a temperature can reach and still be safe for a child or infant.

It is a good idea to know how your health care provider expects you to respond to fevers. When you are upset and worried about a sick child, it is not the best time to discover you don’t agree with your doctor’s treatment protocols.

The following is standard advice from the Web for when to call your doctor if your child is running a fever:

- Newborn to 3 months old – Call immediately for any elevated temp
- 3-5 months old – Call if temp reaches 101 or higher
- 6 months old and up– Call if temp reaches 102 degrees or more

Your healthcare provider should never make you feel

uncomfortable for calling with any concern about your child. On the other end of the spectrum, if you don't call when your provider thinks you should, you might find yourself in an uncomfortable confrontation. Knowing your health care provider's basic protocols – and knowing whether you agree with them -is an invaluable aid in choosing the right person to advise you. It is also a great tool to aid you in developing a strong and trusting relationship. If your health care provider doesn't offer these protocols in writing (they should!), ask questions and take notes.

What Temperature is Considered a Fever?

Generally, an oral temperature exceeding 100.4^{0}F (which is 38^{0}C for those smart enough to be on the metric system) is considered a fever.

Our bodies regulate temperature within a limited range.

Although individual baseline temperatures do vary, 98.6^{o} is the typical baseline temperature. But temperature can also vary based on the time of day, activity level, layers of clothing, or even due to weather. It would be helpful to determine your child's normal baseline temperature and regular variations before a fever occurs.

How to Take Your Child's Temperature

The various ways to take a temperature produce different results. The most accurate methods are oral, rectal, ear, or axillary (armpit) measurements. The newest method, the temporal artery thermometer (swept across the forehead) is also gaining in popularity with reports of high accuracy. But before you use any type of digital device, read and follow the

directions. If you have an old-fashioned glass thermometer, a comparison of results will assure the digital device is correctly calibrated.

The two best things about today's digital thermometers, ear thermometers, and temporal artery thermometers is how fast they are and how they let you know when the reading is complete. Glass thermometers are very slow and require you to hold them in place for a full two to three minutes to gain an accurate reading. Holding any child still for three minutes is difficult at the best of times, much less when they are sick and fussy and you are holding a thermometer pressed into their armpit or rectum.

It is important to note that a temperature taken from the ear, rectum, or temporal artery thermometer will be half a degree to a full degree higher than an oral temperature. An axillary (armpit) temperature will be half a degree to a full degree lower than an oral temperature. Unless otherwise noted, the oral temperature is the temperature stated in everything from the definition of a temperature to warnings and directions for care unless otherwise noted. So, if you do seek medical care or medical advice for a fever, be sure to communicate the method you used to obtain your child's temperature. For example, you would say, "103.4^{0} rectal temperature."

How to Support a Fever, and Let it Break Naturally

For decades, parents have been taught to bring down a fever with pharmaceuticals.

We stopped using aspirin for children in the early 1980s due to its association with Reye's syndrome. The recommendation switched to acetaminophen (Tylenol).

But recent studies revealed an association between

acetaminophen (Tylenol) and autism when it is given after a vaccine or during a viral illness. Also, acetaminophen is very hard on the liver. It is the nation's leading cause of liver failure.

As far as pharmaceuticals go, ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil, etc.) is the last choice for fever reduction. It, however, has its own horrific side effects. WebMD offers an eye-opening list. Do you really want to give this drug to your child?

Instead of thinking in terms of treating or eliminating the fever, we should think in terms of supporting the body's efforts to fight the illness. Fever is a good thing, as long as dehydration is avoided.

If you feel the need to bring down your child's temperature, a cool damp rag to the forehead or back of the neck can be helpful, but immersion in tepid water is the most surefire way to bring down a temperature. If you choose to do this, don't torture your child. Start with water that is warm enough for them to feel comfortable. So start with comfortably warm water and gradually cool it down by adding a little cold water at a time.

Bring toys to the tub. Preferably, you will want your child to stay in the water for 20-30 minutes at a time.

Hydrate, Hydrate, Hydrate

Dress your child in a light layer of clothing and push fluids. If you are nursing, nurse more often. If you are bottle feeding, offer more formula and offer feedings more often. For older children, offer extra water throughout the day. Avoid sugary drinks (including moms that are breastfeeding). If the body is hydrated properly a fever is likely to move up and down a few times and then break. Being properly hydrated before getting sick can be the difference between a fever that does its job and a dangerous fever requiring intervention.

Check out this recipe. The cranberry lemonade can help boost kidney and liver function, which boosts immune function.

A fever that stays at a dangerous temperature is a sign of a dehydrated body. Incidentally, diarrhea indicates a high likelihood of being dehydrated. Mineral deficiencies with an infection cause temporary kidney failure leading to diarrhea, and fevers that don't fluctuate and break. For more on the immune system see

Related Reading:

- *NSAIDs Warning – These Drugs Are Not Safe (Motrin, Advil, Naproxen…)*
- *Aspirin, Ibuprofen, Acetaminophen – Why They All Are Unsafe*
- *Being Diagnosed With Multiple Sclerosis and Refusing To Live With It*
- *Are You Taking a Drug That May Cause Alzheimer's?*
- *Crazy Pills: Over-the-Counter and Prescription Meds Linked To Dementia*
- *Detox Cheap and Easy Without Fasting – Recipes Included*

Sources:

- *National Reye's Syndrome Foundation* – ReyesSyndrome.org
- *Acetaminophen Use for Fever in Children Associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder* – NCBI
- *Ibuprofen Side Effects* – WebMD