

MEDICAL GUIDELINES FOR FEVER

Understanding fever:

The average normal body temperature is about 98.6F (37C), slightly lowered in the morning, and higher in the afternoon. Mild increases to 100.4F (38C) can also be caused by exercising, wearing too many clothes, being outside in hot weather, and, for women, normal hormonal cycles. Some people may react to vaccines or to drugs with fever.

Fever is the body's normal and healthy reaction to infection, and to other minor or more serious illnesses associated with tissue inflammation. Raising the body's temperature is a natural defense mechanism, since high temperature may kill off various bacteria or viruses. A high temperature does not always correspond to the severity of the illness: self-limiting infections caused by many viruses can cause high fever (up to 104F), and serious conditions (such as cancer) may only present with a low-grade, but persistent fever. Therefore it is important to determine the probable cause of fever rather than to treat fever itself. A good nursing or medical evaluation can often locate the cause of the fever and help manage the condition.

Fever in an infant less than 3 months of age:

Newborns and infants are more susceptible to certain serious infections while not showing many obvious signs, except for "poor feeding" or "being fussy". Rectal temperatures are most accurate, and you should call for advice within 24 hours if your young baby (less than 3 months of age) has persistent rectal temperature greater than 100.5F, or act very fussy even if the temperature is normal or below normal.

Fever in children:

Most fevers in this age group are caused by non-serious infections. Self-limiting viral illnesses, such as upper respiratory colds, "stomach flu", or "summer viruses" may cause high temperatures up to 5-7 days. Often, associated signs, such as congestion, vomiting, diarrhea, or a rash help make the diagnosis and home treatment to ease the symptoms of the illness. If there are more worrisome symptoms, like severe irritability and headache, severe ear pain or breathing difficulty, lethargy, joint or bone pain, or unusual rash, or if the cause of the fever is clearly not apparent, please call for advice to be sure that other "hidden" infections (like kidney) are not present.

For most children, measures to keep them comfortable including plenty of fluids (soups...), a light diet, and rest are sufficient. Do not over-dress them, since this may keep their temperatures higher. It is not always important to bring high temperatures down with medications, since fever is a natural way to fight off infection. Please consult the chart for acetaminophen and ibuprofen doses that are appropriate for your child's age. Do not over use! Do not use ibuprofen in infants less than 6 months of age. Do not use aspirin for children if they have chicken pox or suspected influenza illness.

Fever in adults:

Just like for children, fever in adults often means that the body is fighting off an infection; other associated symptoms may help locate the cause of the illness. Symptom relief can be achieved with rest, drinking plenty of fluids, and a bland diet. Occasional use of over-the-counter medicine, such as aspirin, acetaminophen, ibuprofen or naproxen may be helpful, but do not overuse them. Most minor infections get better in 3-5 days. Call for, or seek medical advice early should you have an unusual rash, a localized pain (severe sore throat and difficulty swallowing; burning pain with urination; kidney, pelvis, chest or joint pain), or other serious symptoms.

Persistent fever (> 2 weeks), even if low grade (100F range), especially when associated with weight loss, fatigue, and other findings such as enlarged lymph glands, abdominal or pelvic discomfort, may indicate a potentially serious condition for which you need to see your medical provider. It is important not to "mask a fever" by consuming too much pain or anti-inflammatory medications without first checking with your provider.

PLEASE CALL FOR FURTHER ADVICE, OR MAKE APPOINTMENT IF YOU HAVE MORE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS.