

Fevers: Dispelling the Myths and Worries

At Center for Living Health, we get many calls from parents worried because their child has a fever. Misconceptions about fever are commonplace. Many parents lose sleep and needlessly worry due to unwarranted concerns about the harmful side effects of fever.

Remember, Child fevers are a normal and healthy response of the body to an illness. A Fever is a physiological mechanism that has beneficial effects in fighting infection. When the immune system produces a fever, it does so to increase both the heart rate and respiratory rate, which increases the blood, filled with oxygen and nutrients, to all the tissues that are trying to fight the infection.

Although many parents administer medications to reduce a fever, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen, to a child, the American Academy of Pediatrics emphasizes that the primary goal should be to help the child feel more comfortable, rather than to maintain a “normal” temperature.

- Parents should focus on the general well-being of the child, his/her activity, observing the child for signs of serious illness and maintaining appropriate fluid intake.
- Parents should not wake up a sleeping child to administer a fever-reducer. Medications must be stored safely to avoid accidental ingestions.
- Parents should be aware that the correct dosage is based on the child’s weight, and that an accurate measuring device should always be used.

We believe in educating our patients so you can make informed decisions about your child’s health. We’ve compiled the following guidelines from Dr. Allen, based on the American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations, to help dispel the myth’s about fevers.

The most important thing to remember about Fevers is that overall, most fevers are harmless. **In fact, most fevers are good for children because fevers help them to fight infection.**

MYTH #1: My child feels warm, so she has a fever.

FACT: Children can feel warm for a many reasons such as playing hard, crying, getting out of a warm bed or being outside on a hot day. The average normal body temperature is 98.6°F to a high of 99.6°F (37.6°C) in the late afternoon. Each child has a normal temperature range that may be different from another child’s. Mild increases to 100.4°F (38°C) can be caused by exercising, wearing too many clothes, taking a hot bath, or being outside in hot weather, and are considered normal.

If your child has a fever, remember to stay calm and use the following definitions to put your child’s fever into perspective (for children under 2-3 months old, you should immediately call your doctor):

- **100-102 F** (37.8-38.9 C): Low-grade fevers are beneficial.
- **102-104 F** (38.9-40.0 C): Moderate-grade fevers are beneficial.
- **> 104 F – 105.9** (>40.0-41.08 C): Higher fevers may cause discomfort but are harmless and still beneficial.
- **> 106 F** (>41.1 C): Very unusual for the immune system to produce such a high fever. There is a higher risk of bacterial infection, or other serious problem. Give ibuprofen and call your doctor immediately.
- **> 108 F** (>42.2 C): The fever itself can be harmful and is a medical emergency.

MYTH #2: All fevers are bad for children.

FACT: Fevers turn on the body’s immune system and help the body fight infection, by increasing the blood, oxygen, and nutrients in the tissues that are fighting the infection. Fevers are one of the body’s best protective mechanisms. **Normal fevers between 100° and 105.9° F (37.8° – 40.8° C) are actually GOOD for sick children.**

MYTH #3: Fevers above 104° F (40° C) are dangerous and can cause brain damage.

FACT: Fevers with infections don’t cause brain damage. Only body temperatures above 108° F (42° C) can cause brain damage. The body temperature climbs this high only with extreme environmental temperatures (for example, if a child is confined to a closed car in hot weather).

MYTH #4: Anyone can have a febrile seizure (seizure triggered by fever).

FACT: Only 4% of children between the ages of 6 months and 6 years will ever have a febrile seizure. And of those, most will only have one.

MYTH #5: Febrile seizures are harmful.

FACT: Febrile seizures are scary to watch, but they cause no permanent harm and usually stop within 5 minutes.. Children who have had febrile seizures do not have a greater risk for developmental delays, learning disabilities, or epilepsy.

MYTH #6: All fevers need to be treated with fever medicine.

FACT: Fevers only need to be treated if they cause unreasonable discomfort, inability to drink, or interact with you. Usually fevers don't cause significant discomfort until they go above 102° or 103° F (39° or 39.5° C). Because of the potential side effects of conventional medicines (acetaminophen and ibuprofen), homeopathic remedies like Apis Belladonna provide a safe and effective alternative. Never use cold baths or topical alcohol to cool down your child. The goal is to make your child more comfortable. If your child is hot and sweaty at 102° F , strip them down and use a room temperature washcloth to gently cool them down. However if your child has a tempo of 105 ° F and is feeling cold, has goosebumps, or teeth chattering, put another blanket on them.

MYTH #7: Without treatment, fevers will keep going higher.

FACT: Wrong. Because the brain has a thermostat, fevers from infection usually don't go above 103° or 104° F (39.5°- 40° C). They rarely go to 105° or 105.9° F (40.6° or 41.1° C). While the latter are "high" fevers, they are harmless ones.

MYTH #8: With treatment, fevers should come down to normal.

FACT: With treatment, fevers usually come down only 2° or 3° F (1° or 1.5° C).

MYTH #9: If the fever doesn't come down (if you can't "break the fever"), the cause is serious.

FACT: Fevers that don't respond to fever medicine can be caused by viruses or bacteria. It doesn't relate to the seriousness of the infection.

MYTH #10: Once the fever comes down with medicines, it should stay down.

FACT: The fever will normally last for 2 or 3 days with most viral infections, but may last 5 days or longer (If the fever persists longer than 7 days, call your doctor immediately). Therefore, when the fever medicine wears off, the fever will return. The fever will go away and not return once your child's body and immune system overpowers the virus (usually by the fourth- fifth day).

MYTH #11: If the fever is high (104-105.9 ° F, the cause is serious.

FACT: If the fever is high, the cause may or may not be serious. If your child looks very sick, the cause is more likely to be serious, so call your doctor immediately.

MYTH #12: The exact number of the temperature is very important.

FACT: The exact number of your child's temperature or fever is not as important as how your child looks and feels. I would not necessarily treat the number unless it was greater than 106° F.

- **Is your child reasonably comfortable, or complaining of pain and can't sleep, or drink?**
- **Is your child alert, interactive, and curious despite the fever?**
- **Is he or she drinking and urinating?**

MYTH #13: Oral temperatures between 98.7° and 100.4° F (37.1° to 38° C) are low-grade fevers.

FACT: These temperatures are normal variations. The body's temperature normally changes throughout the day. It peaks in the late afternoon and evening. An actual low-grade fever is 100.4° F to 102° F (38° – 39° C).