

# Fever

Fever is a sign that your child is fighting an infection. It is usually harmless. Your child's fever should go away in about 3 days. If it doesn't, call your child's doctor.

## What Is a Fever?

A fever is a body temperature (TEM-pruh-chur) that is higher than normal. Most doctors agree that anything over **100.4°F** or **38°C** is a fever. (See "Words to Know" for "F" and "C.")

Your child may feel warm, shiver, or look flushed. You will need to take your child's temperature to know for sure. (See the AAP handout "How to Take Your Child's Temperature" if you need help.)

Fever is *not* a sickness. It is a *sign (symptom)* of sickness. It can be caused by lots of things, like a cold, the flu, or an ear infection. Look for *other* symptoms to figure out what is causing your child's fever. (Antibiotics only help if they are the right treatment for what your child has.)

## Call the Doctor Right Away If...

...your child:

- Is *2 months* or younger and has a fever, OR
- Has a high fever, over 103°F (39.4°C), OR
- Has a fever more than 3 days.

You also should call the doctor if your child has a fever and any of these signs:

- Looks very sick, is very sleepy or very fussy
- Has other symptoms, like a stiff neck, rash, bad headache, sore throat, ear pain, throwing up, or **diarrhea\***



- Has had a seizure (See "What to Do for a Seizure" on the second page of this handout.)
- Has sickle cell disease, cancer, or another disease that makes it hard to fight infections
- Takes steroids
- Has been in a very hot place, like a closed car in summer

## What to Do

Making children feel better helps them drink and eat. This helps them get better. They often get more active too. That's OK. They don't have to rest to get better.

To help your child feel better:

- Comfort your child.
- Give your child water, juice mixed with water, or an **electrolyte drink\*** for children. Breast milk is fine for nursing babies.
- Help your child rest if he or she feels tired.
- Cool your child down if the fever is over 101°F or 38.3°C *and* your child is uncomfortable. See "Tips to Cool Down a Fever" on the second page of this handout.

## \* Words to Know

"F" stands for Fahrenheit (FER-un-hyt)—a scale of numbers to show temperature. Used mostly in the United States.

"C" stands for Centigrade (SEN-tuh-grayd)—a different scale of numbers to show temperature. Used mostly outside the United States.

**acetaminophen** (uh-set-tuh-MIN-uh-fin)—a medicine for pain and fever. Tylenol is one brand of acetaminophen.

**diarrhea** (dye-uh-REE-yuh)—passing loose, watery stools.

**electrolyte** (uh-LEK-troh-lyt) **drink**—a sugar and salt drink you can buy in a bottle. Pedialyte is one brand made for children.

**ibuprofen** (eye-byoo-PROH-fin)—a medicine for pain and fever. Advil and Motrin are brands of ibuprofen.

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## Tips to Cool Down a Fever

- Give your child medicine to bring down the fever:

- For a baby 6 months or younger, give **acetaminophen**\*.
- For a baby or child older than 6 months, give *either* acetaminophen or **ibuprofen**\*.

Both of these medicines help with fever. But they are not the same. Be sure to get the right kind of medicine for your child's age. Follow what the label says. Ask your child's doctor how much to give if your child is younger than 2 years.

**Note:** *Never* give your child aspirin.

- Give your child a bath. Try this if the fever is 104°F (40°C) or higher, *and* your child can't take fever medicine.

The water should be cooler than your child is, but still warm (lukewarm). Sponge the water over your child's body (5 or 10 minutes is enough).

If your child starts to shiver during the bath, then the water is too cold. And shivering can make a fever worse.

Take your child out of the bath if he or she shivers.

## What Not to Do

- Don't give your child aspirin. It's dangerous for children younger than 18 years.
- Don't rub or bathe your child with rubbing alcohol. Rubbing alcohol can make children sick.
- Don't make your child cold enough to shiver. Shivering warms the body up more.



## What to Do for a Seizure

Fever can cause a seizure (SEE-zher) in some young children. Seizures are scary, but usually harmless. Your child may look strange, shake, then stiffen and twitch.

His or her eyes may roll. If this happens:

- Lay your child down on the floor or a bed.
- Turn your child's head to the side. That way, spit or vomit can drain out.
- Don't put anything in your child's mouth.
- Call the doctor.

The doctor should always check your child after a seizure.

To learn more, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Web site at [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org).

Your child's doctor will tell you to do what's best for your child.

This information should not take the place of talking with your child's doctor.

Note: Brand names are for your information only. The AAP does not recommend any specific brand of drugs or products.

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