

# FEVERS

Do they need to be controlled?

Most of us have grown up with a fear of fevers or a concern that they must be controlled as soon as they begin. The truth about the mechanism of fevers can be a relief for parents and instrumental in the child's illness and recovery.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Fever in children is defined as a:
  - Rectal temperature over 100.4 F (38 C)
  - Oral temperature over 99.5 F (37.5 C)
  - Axillary temperature over 98.6 F (37 C)
2. It is normal for the body's temperature to fluctuate between 97.5 to 99.5 f; will typically have the lowest reading in the morning.
3. Fever is a symptom, not a disease.
4. Fever is a common occurrence in children and viral infections are the most common cause. The fever will range from 101-104 F (38.5 -40 C) and last for 2-3 days.
5. Fever is the body's natural response that stimulates the immune system by releasing and activating white blood cells and interferon.
6. Extra fluids should be encouraged because body fluids can be lost during a fever.
7. Fever phobia is a term to describe over anxious parents response to low grade fever.
8. Schmitt's study (1980) found that 80% of parents thought fevers between 104-106 F (40 and 41.1 C) cause brain damage. About 20% of parents thought that if they did not treat the fever, it would keep going higher. Neither of these statements is true. Because of this misconception, many parents treat low-grade fevers unnecessarily.  
Ref: Schmitt BD. Fever phobia: Misconceptions of parents about fever.  
Amer J Dis Child 1980; 134:176
9. Most childhood fevers remain below 106 F (41 C)
10. Brain damage can occur if the fever goes higher than 107 F (41.7 C)

## GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATING CHILDREN WITH FEVER

Refer for medical evaluation if:

- a. Child with a fever of 101 F (38.3 C) or higher under 2 months old
- b. Fever over 105 F
- c. Child is crying inconsolably or whimpering
- d. Child cries when moved or otherwise touched by parents or has a stiff neck
- e. Child is difficult to awaken
- f. Child is drooling saliva and is unable to swallow anything
- g. Breathing difficulty with no improvement after nose is cleared
- h. Any purple spots present on the skin
- i. A convulsion, also known as febrile seizure, has occurred and lasted more than 15 minutes or has been continuing intermittently for more than 30 minutes
- j. Child looks or acts very sick
- k. Fever has persisted for over 24 hours and is of unknown origin

With this information, you the parent can understand the real value behind your child's fever. If you are less fearful your child will be less stressed during recovery.