

# Fever?

## No sweat

Kimberley Foster

It's the *middle of the night* and you're awakened by a faint *whimpering* sound. You tiptoe into your child's bedroom and *touch her head*. Your little one is burning up. Fear takes hold. *What do you do?*

First, don't panic. A fever is usually simply the body's normal reaction to infection—and infection is an inevitable part of childhood. It's the unknown that can make us most anxious. Armed with knowledge, however, you can take control of the situation.

### TAKING A TEMPERATURE

You can often detect the presence of a fever by feeling your child's forehead, but taking an accurate temperature is an essential parenting skill. Mercury thermometers are no longer recommended. Instead, a good digital thermometer will do the trick.

For children younger than three years, the best way to take a temperature is rectally. Yes, rectally—you can do it. Place your baby on her back and bend her legs to her chest. Lubricate a clean thermometer with a small amount of petroleum jelly, insert half an inch, don't let go, and *voilà*. Once you hear the beep, you've got your reading.

Taking an axillary (armpit) reading is perhaps the easiest method, but the least accurate. Slip the bulb of the thermometer under your child's bare underarm and hold her arm tightly against her chest. Leave the thermometer there until you hear the beep.

Once your child is four or five years old, you can take her temperature by mouth. Place the bulb of the thermometer under your child's tongue and leave it there for one minute until you hear—you guessed it—the beep.

An ear thermometer can be an option for older babies and children, but it can be expensive and tricky to use. For an accurate reading, straighten the ear canal by gently tugging back on the ear before inserting the probe.

### MANAGING A FEVER

You don't need to race to the medicine cabinet when dealing with a child's fever. It's not necessarily the temperature that needs to be treated, but the discomfort it causes. A helpful guideline to keep in mind is this: treat the child, not the reading on the thermometer.

There are many nonpharmaceutical ways to help your fussy baby or achy child feel more comfortable. To start, don't overdress your tot. Light cotton pyjamas will allow excess body heat to escape. Drinking plenty of cold liquids will help cool that hot body and prevent dehydration. There is conflicting advice about lukewarm baths. It's perhaps worth a try, but be careful not to use water that's too

cool—you'll only induce shivering, which will increase body temperature.

If you've done your best and your little hot potato is still uncomfortable, consider medication. Your options include acetaminophen (Tylenol or Tempra) and ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin). Aspirin (ASA) is a no go, however. It's been linked with Reye's syndrome, a rare but serious condition in children and teenagers with fever.

Dosages should be calculated based on weight. The dosing guidelines on the package, usually based on age, are generally safe, unless your child is particularly large or small for her age. Be careful to avoid giving an excessively high dose of acetaminophen as this can be toxic to the liver.

### WHEN A FEVER BECOMES COMPLICATED: FEBRILE SEIZURES

Of course, this is what every parent fears. It's true, witnessing a febrile seizure can be terrifying.

How do you recognize a seizure? A child will typically stiffen, become unresponsive, roll his eyes, and twitch. However, it's important to remember that the seizure itself is, in fact, harmless to your child. A febrile seizure won't



### NORMAL TEMPERATURE RANGE

Measurement location	Celsius	Fahrenheit
mouth	35.5 to 37.5	95.9 to 99.5
rectum	36.6 to 38	97.9 to 100.4
armpit	34.7 to 37.3	94.5 to 99.1
ear	35.8 to 38	96.4 to 100.4

cause brain damage or any other serious health consequence. But there are some important things to keep in mind.

If you suspect a seizure, act quickly to prevent injury. Place your child on a flat surface away from sharp or dangerous objects. Turn him on his side to allow vomit or saliva to drain, but don't restrain him. Don't put anything in his mouth; he will not swallow his tongue. Most febrile seizures last less than one minute, though it can feel like an eternity.

If the seizure lasts longer than three minutes, or if your baby is less than

six months old, you should call 911 or the emergency number in your area. Otherwise, visit your doctor within a few hours of any seizure—no matter how brief—to rule out underlying factors, such as meningitis, that might have triggered the seizure.

Caring for a feverish child is a rite of passage for parents. With a calm, logical approach, you and your child will get through it, no worries. **b**

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### When to see your doctor

A high temperature doesn't automatically warrant a trip to the doctor. Most of the time you can stay at home and keep your little one comfortable while the fever settles on its own. But there are times when you should see a physician:

- » fever in a child under six months of age
- » high fever (over 39.4 C or 103 F) in a child older than six months of age
- » fever lasting longer than 72 hours
- » signs of dehydration such as dry mouth, tearless crying, or decreased urination
- » signs the infection may be more than a simple virus, including earache, severe sore throat, unexplained rash, repeated vomiting, severe cough, or difficulty breathing
- » excessive fussiness, irritability, or lethargy
- » seizure

### NATURAL RELIEF

Homeopathy offers several remedies, each of which suits a particular type of fever. Different formulas work best for fevers due to colds, flu, or other illnesses. Some companies even offer child-specific formulas. Talk to a natural health retailer and consult your health care practitioner before deciding on the right natural products for your child.