

Kids First

Burning Up With Fever



Your child is hot, flushed, glassy-eyed and obviously not well. Your diagnosis is fever! You are very concerned and even a little panic sets in. After all, you've been trained to think of fever as something that should actually be treated.

Let's look at this fever thing calmly for a moment. We've been taught that normal body temperature is 98.6 F (37 C)—right? Wrong!

Ninety-eight point six degrees only represents an average. Your child's body temperature can hover anywhere between 97 and 100 degrees and still be considered "normal." Fever is simply heat. Normal body heat is the result of your child's body working as it was meant to, under the perfect control of the nervous system.

To help your child recover when he is fighting a flu bug or other infection, two things happen. First, the nervous system commands an increase in heat production in order to literally "burn" the invading germ, which can only survive at a "normal" body temperature. Any increase in heat, therefore, kills such germs. This is a good thing!

Second, as a result of orders from the nervous system, many body activities speed up. Respiration increases, the heart rate goes up in order to pump blood faster, breathing quickens, the skin is moist and clammy and the child begins to shiver. (By the way, shivering is needed to cause muscles to work harder and produce extra heat.) This extra work produces extra heat. We call this fever. Simple!

All this activity has a purpose: to eliminate an invading germ. This does not necessarily mean your child is "sick." The body is doing exactly what it has been naturally programmed to do. Fever is an expression of health. But as a loving parent, it is at this point that you feel you have to do something.

Not necessarily. The most important things to do are to understand why this increase in body temperature is happening, provide supportive care and allow your child's body to do what it needs to do with no interference.

The height (temperature) of a fever has no bearing on the seriousness of the condition and there is absolutely no clinical evidence to suggest that high fever causes convulsions or brain damage. Logically, why would the nervous system increase temperature to injure itself? It's an old wives' tale.

On its own, a high fever is not critical. But when there are other signs of sickness, it could be an indicator of a developing serious condition.

If your child is less than one year old and has a fever with the presence of any of the following signs, you should seek the advice of your health care provider:

- is in severe pain and cannot be comforted;
- is anxious and/or lethargic;
- whines continuously;
- cannot retain fluids and/or has diarrhea;
- has difficulty breathing, urinating or swallowing;
- has an unexplained rash and a pulse rate of over 120 per minute.

So why do you have to take a child's temperature when he is feverish? Good question. You don't. Increasing numbers of physicians now feel that

the taking of temperature is an unnecessary ritual. I couldn't agree more.

This idea was borne out of marketing efforts by the pharmaceutical industry, whose aim was to teach the public that fever should be feared and treated so that sales of anti-fever medications would soar. This marketing plan was very effective and is still prevalent today.

It is neither necessary, nor wise to lower body temperature. Fever is not the problem, simply the result of the body attempting to recover. Medications taken to lower the temperature work only temporarily. Once they are excreted from the body, the temperature will again increase. The reason is that these drugs have no effect on the real problem and therefore nothing is really changed by giving them to your child.

There are a number of natural health products you can find in a health food store which may help your child cope with malaise while his body is "doing its thing." Ask. Fever should be viewed as a sign; the nervous system and immune system doing exactly what they are designed to do.

I suggest that the next time your child has a fever, understand the reason. Don't jump the gun and try to lower your child's temperature; you may actually delay recovery. Lastly, have your child checked by a pediatric chiropractor to ensure he has an optimally functioning nervous system that can deal successfully with illness. ■

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