



# When Is My Child's Fever Serious?

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Fever is a symptom, not a disease. It is the body's normal response to infections and plays a role in fighting them by turning on the body's immune system. Fever is defined as:

- oral temperature  $>37.5^{\circ}\text{C}$
- axillary temperature  $>37.3^{\circ}\text{C}$
- rectal temperature  $>38^{\circ}\text{C}$

The usual fevers ( $37.8^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $40^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) that all children get are not harmful. Most are caused by viral illnesses and some by bacterial illnesses. Teething causes fussiness in babies but does not cause fever.

Four percent of normal, healthy children aged 6 months to 5 years old may throw a fit with high fever. The average temperature at which fits occur is  $40^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The fever itself can be caused by an infection in any part of the body and each febrile seizure usually lasts 1 to 10 minutes if no treatment is given.



## How do I treat my child's fever?

Dress your child very lightly. Give him/her plenty of cool, clear liquids to drink. Children like drinks like home-made barley water, chrysanthemum-flavoured drinks, popsicles, or iced drinks.

You may need to sponge your child, especially if his/her temperature is above  $38.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ . If your doctor has prescribed a fever reducing suppository, please insert it into the anus first, then sponge your child.

First, prepare a tub of lukewarm water and 2 to 3 washcloths or thin towels. Undress your child and place him/her on your lap. To help your child relax, give him/her some toys to play with.

Sponge your child with the wet cloth or towel using long smooth strokes over the chest, trunk, arms, legs and face. Wet his/her head too. Leave one wet towel over the body at all times. Continue for about 15 to 20 minutes. If your child is cooperative, let him/her sit in 2 inches of water, and keep wetting his/her skin surface.

After sponging, dry your child's hair and body and dress him/her in light clothing. Check your child's temperature half an hour later. Remember not to bundle your child with thick blankets or jackets, as this may worsen the fever. Give your child a light cotton blanket if your child feels cold or is shivering.





## How do I serve oral acetaminophen products for reducing fever?

There are different commercial preparations of acetaminophen available in pharmacies as an “over-the-counter” drug. It is important to read the label carefully. Each of these products has different strengths of acetaminophen, so be careful to check the actual dosage you serve.



Acetaminophen products are available in liquid and tablet form. Children older than 2 months can be given acetaminophen products. Give the correct dosage according to your child's age at 4 to 6 hour intervals, but not more often. Please consult your doctor or pharmacist for the correct dosage and frequency.

## Dosages of Acetaminophen

The dosage is calculated according to your child's body weight in kilogrammes. In general, the total dose of acetaminophen should not exceed 60mg per kg of body weight per day.



For example, if your child weighs 10 kg, the total dosage of acetaminophen in 24 hours should not exceed 600mg. Remember to check the concentration of the liquid acetaminophen you are serving and follow these guidelines:

Each dose: Give acetaminophen at 10mg or 15mg per kg bodyweight. Dosing interval: 4 to 6 hourly.

Please follow your doctor's instructions carefully if fever reducing products to be placed in the anus (suppositories) are prescribed.

## When to sound the alarm.

Most viral infections are not serious and can be handled easily at home. However, some infections are serious and they warrant extra care. Here are some guidelines to help you.

### (A) Rush your child to a doctor immediately if:

- your 2-month old baby (or younger) develops a fever
- the fever exceeds 40°C
- your child is crying inconsolably
- you have difficulty waking him/her
- your child's neck is stiff
- you find purple spots on your child's skin
- your child has difficulty breathing even after clearing his/her nose
- your child is unable to swallow and is drooling
- your child is showing signs of being very sick (if possible, observe your child's behaviour 1 hour after your child has taken acetaminophen)
- your child has fever with chills and rigors, or his/her lips and hands have turned blue
- your child has a past history of a serious bacterial infection
- your child threw a fit

### (B) Call your doctor during regular hours if:

- the fever lasts more than three days
- discharge from the nose or eyes turn thick yellow for more than 24 hours, or if the skin under the openings of the nose becomes raw or scabbed over. These symptoms may indicate the presence of bacterial infection
- your child has fever and an earache or sinus pain (i.e. pain over the cheekbones)
- your child has fever and vomits as well
- the throat becomes quite sore, or if there are painful lymph nodes over the neck, as this may indicate a bacterial throat infection
- burning or pain occurs with urination
- your child has had fever for more than 24 hours without an obvious cause or location of infection
- your child develops a rash
- your child has a chesty cough and is too breathless to talk, drink or play