

FEVER

Fever is an elevation above the normal body temperature. It is best measured with a digital thermometer, and is most easily performed under the arm (axially). As our normal body temperature varies depending on the time of the day, there is no absolute temperature that constitutes a fever. However, I use a cut-off of 100.5 or greater, taken under the arm, without adding or subtracting (as people are often told to do).

A fever is two things. First, it is a clue that something is going on - an illness to which the body is responding. Second, it is our body's way of fighting infection. Higher temperatures kill germs.

The down side of fever is that it makes us more "achy", and more tired and ill-feeling. However, fever does not cause death, brain-damage or seizures. (The exception is the rare child who is prone to febrile seizure. These are scary to parents, but cause no brain damage, and do not require medicine. There is usually a family history of these, which should alert parents to the possibility in their children.)

Fever is usually a minor problem, accompanying a cold or flu, and causing headache and-or muscle aches. This can be treated with acetaminophen and/or ibuprofen as needed.

Fever is serious in newborns and young infants -- it can be the first sign of a serious infection. It is also serious if your child appears very ill or "out-of-it", has a stiff neck, severe abdominal pain, hot swollen joint, flank pain, burning with urination, breathing difficulty, bruising, or a pin-point rash with the appearance of blood vessels having burst. Any of these symptoms need to be seen immediately, in the office or in an Emergency Room--NOT AN URGENT CARE. Most illnesses causing fever will do so from one to four days. During this time, consider your child contagious.

If your child is acting well or mildly ill, there is no need to treat fever. Give plenty of fluids and keep your child comfortable. If your child is feeling "achy" or uncomfortable, Acetaminophen (Tylenol) can be given every four hours. Additionally, Ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) can be given every six hours if necessary, not to exceed the manufacturer's dosing recommendations for these medicines. Fever lasting more than five days or any signs of serious illness need to be seen in the office or the emergency room.