Fever

Fever is a higher-than-normal body temperature. A normal temperature varies with:

- Age.
- How it is measured (mouth, underarm, rectal, or ear).
- Time of day.

In an adult, an oral temperature around 98.6° Fahrenheit (F) or 37° Celsius (C) is considered normal. A rise in temperature of about 1.8° F or 1° C is generally considered a fever (100.4° F or 38° C). In an infant age 28 days or less, a rectal temperature of 100.4º F (38ºC) generally is regarded as fever. Fever is not a disease but can be a symptom of illness.

CAUSES

- Fever is most commonly caused by infection.
- Some non-infectious problems can cause fever. For example:
  - Some arthritis problems.
  - Problems with the thyroid or adrenal glands.
  - Immune system problems.
  - Some kinds of cancer.
  - A reaction to certain medicines.
- Occasionally, the source of a fever cannot be determined. This is sometimes called a "Fever of Unknown Origin".
- Some situations may lead to a temporary rise in body temperature that may go away on its own. Examples are:
  - Childbirth.
  - Surgery.
- Some situations may cause a rise in body temperature but these are not considered “true fever”. Examples are:
  - Intense exercise.
  - Dehydration.
  - Exposure to high outside or room temperatures.

SYMPTOMS

- Feeling warm or hot.
- Fatigue or feeling exhausted.
- Aching all over.
- Chills.
- Shivering.
- Sweats.

DIAGNOSIS

A fever can be suspected by your caregiver feeling that your skin is unusually warm. The fever is confirmed by taking a temperature with a thermometer. Temperatures can be taken different ways. Some methods are accurate and some are not:

With adults, adolescents, and children:

- An oral temperature is used most commonly.
- An ear thermometer will only be accurate if it is positioned as recommended by the manufacturer.
- Under the arm temperatures are not accurate and not recommended.
- Most electronic thermometers are fast and accurate.

Infants and Toddlers:

- Rectal temperatures are recommended and most accurate.

- Ear temperatures are not accurate in this age group and are not recommended.
- Skin thermometers are not accurate.

RISKS AND COMPLICATIONS

- During a fever, the body uses more oxygen, so a person with a fever may develop rapid breathing or shortness of breath. This can be dangerous especially in people with heart or lung disease.
- The sweats that occur following a fever can cause dehydration.
- High fever can cause seizures in infants and children.
- Older persons can develop confusion during a fever.

TREATMENT

- Medication may be used to control temperature.
- Do not give aspirin to children with fevers. There is an association with Reye's syndrome. Reye's syndrome is a rare but potentially deadly disease.
- If an infection is present and medications have been prescribed, take them as directed. Finish the full course of medications until they are gone.
- Sponging or bathing with room-temperature water may help reduce body temperature. Do not use ice water or alcohol sponge baths.
- Do not over-bundle children in blankets or heavy clothes.
- Drinking adequate fluids during an illness with fever is important to prevent dehydration.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- For adults, rest and adequate fluid intake are important. Dress according to how you feel, but do not over-bundle.
- Drink enough water and/or fluids to keep your urine clear or pale yellow.
- For infants over 3 months and children, giving medication as directed by your caregiver to control fever can help with comfort. The amount to be given is based on the child's weight. **Do NOT** give more than is recommended.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You or your child are unable to keep fluids down.
- Vomiting or diarrhea develops.
- You develop a skin rash.
- An oral temperature above 102º F (38.9º C) develops, or a fever which persists for over 3 days.
- You develop excessive weakness, dizziness, fainting or extreme thirst.
- Fevers keep coming back after 3 days.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Shortness of breath or trouble breathing develops
- You pass out.
- You feel you are making little or no urine.
- New pain develops that was not there before (such as in the head, neck, chest, back, or abdomen).
- You cannot hold down fluids.
- Vomiting and diarrhea persist for more than a day or two.
- You develop a stiff neck and/or your eyes become sensitive to light.
- An unexplained temperature above 102° F (38.9° C) develops.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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