

Treatments and drugs

Medical treatment depends on the cause of your fever. The best treatment is often rest and plenty of fluids.

Your doctor may also make a recommendation about using **over-the-counter** medications, such as acetaminophen (*Tylenol*, others) or ibuprofen (*Advil*, *Motrin*, others) to lower a high fever. Adults may also use aspirin, but don't give aspirin to any one under 21 years of age. It may trigger a rare, but potentially fatal, disorder known as Reye's syndrome.



When using O.T.C. medications, follow the package instructions. Remember if you are taking acetaminophen, the **maximum** dose in 24 hours is 4 grams (= 4000 mg.).

Ibuprofen is available in 200-mg. tablets (*Advil*, *Motrin*, etc.) The usual dosage is two tablets (400 mg.) every 4 hours with maximum dosage of 2400 mg in a 24-hour period.

Healthcare providers may recommend that you alternate taking acetaminophen and ibuprofen for your fever and pain relief. These are alternated every 2 hours. An *example* of the usual dosage schedule is:

- 8 a.m.— Acetaminophen 650 mg.
- 10 a.m. — Ibuprofen 400 mg.
- 12 p.m. — Acetaminophen 650 mg.
- 2 p.m. — Ibuprofen 400 mg.

(The recommended dosage for acetaminophen or ibuprofen to be taken **every 4 hours** is maintained with *alternating* these medications.)



The downside of lowering a fever

If you have only a low-grade fever, it's not advisable to try to lower your temperature. Doing so may only prolong the illness or mask your symptoms and make it harder to determine the cause. Some experts believe that aggressively treating a fever actually interferes with your body's immune response. That's because the viruses that cause colds and other respiratory infections thrive at cool temperatures. By producing a low-grade fever, your body may actually be helping eliminate a virus.

PREVENTION

The best way to prevent fevers is to reduce your exposure to infectious diseases. One of the most effective ways to do that is also one of the simplest—frequent hand washing.

Wash your hands often, especially before you eat and after using the toilet, spending time in a crowded public place, or petting animals. Wash your hands vigorously, covering both the front and back of each hand with soap, and rinsing thoroughly under running water. Carry hand-washing towelettes with you for times when you don't have access to soap and water. Avoid touching your nose, mouth or eyes—the main way viral infections are transmitted. "Cough into your elbow" is suggested.

Because your body loses more water with a fever, be sure to drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration. Make sure you get enough rest. Be careful to avoid taking too much medication. Don't use any medication for temperatures below 102° F. (=38.9°C.) unless advised by your healthcare provider.

Adapted from : *Treating Fever*—UHS Medical Directives; *Fever*: Mayo Clinic; *Fever (for Teenagers)*— Clinical Reference Systems

Revised: December 2008

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Fever



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UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME
NOTRE DAME IN 46556

FEVER

A fever means the body temperature is above normal. A fever isn't an illness itself, but it's usually a sign that something out of the ordinary is going on in your body. Fevers aren't necessarily bad. In fact, fevers seem to play a key role in helping your body fight off a number of infections.

Most fevers range from 101—104° F. (39.5° C.) and last 2-3 days. In general, the height of the fever does not relate to the seriousness of the illness. How sick you feel is what counts. Fever causes no permanent harm until it reaches 107° F. Fortunately, the brain's thermostat keeps untreated fevers below this level.

SYMPTOMS

Depending on what is causing your fever additional fever symptoms may include:

- Sweating
- Shivering
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Lack of appetite
- Dehydration
- General weakness

Very high fevers may cause:

- Confusion
- Irritability

Please contact or see your healthcare provider if you have other neurological symptoms.

CAUSES

Even when you're well, your body temperature varies throughout the day—it's lower in the morning and higher in the late afternoon and evening.

Although most people consider 98.6° F. (= 37° C) a healthy body temperature, yours may vary by a degree or more. In fact, your normal temperature can range from about 97 to 99° F.

Your body temperature is set by your hypothalamus, an area at the base of your brain that acts as a thermostat for your whole system. When something's wrong, your normal temperature is simply set a few points higher. The new set-point, for example, may be 102° F instead of 97 or 98° F.

What happens with a fever

When a fever starts and your body tries to elevate its temperature, you feel chilly and may shiver to generate heat. At this point, you probably wrap yourself in your thickest blanket and turn up the heating pad. But eventually, as your body reaches its new set-point, you likely feel hot. And when your temperature finally begins to return to normal, you may sweat profusely, which is your body's way of dissipating the excess heat.

A fever usually means your body is responding to a viral or bacterial infection. Sometimes heat exhaustion, extreme sunburn or certain inflammatory conditions may trigger fever as well.

TAKING A TEMPERATURE



There are several types of thermometers you can use, including electronic thermometers and ear (tympanic) thermometers. Thermometers with digital readouts and those that take the temperature quickly from the ear canal are especially useful for young children and older adults. Because glass mercury thermometers harm both humans and the environment, they have been phased out and are no longer recommended.



Tests and Diagnosis

Your doctor will likely diagnose the cause of your fever based on your other symptoms and a physical exam. Sometimes you may need additional tests to confirm a diagnosis.

When to seek medical advice

Fevers by themselves in adults, may not be a cause for alarm—or reason to call a doctor. Yet there are some circumstances when you should seek medical advice.

- Your temperature is more than 103° F (39.5° C)
- You've had a fever *for more than three* (3) days.

In addition, call your doctor **immediately** if any of these signs and symptoms accompany a fever:

- Severe headache
- Severe swelling of your throat
- Unusual skin rash, especially if the rash gets rapidly worse
- Unusual eye sensitivity to bright light
- Stiff neck and pain when you bend your head forward
- Mental confusion
- Persistent vomiting
- Difficulty breathing or chest pain
- Extreme listlessness or irritability
- Abdominal pain or pain when urinating
- Any other unexplained signs or symptoms

