Colds and Flu

What is a Fever?

Fever is the body's normal and healthy reaction to infection and other illnesses, both minor and serious. It helps the body fight infection. Fever is a symptom, not a disease. In most cases, having a fever means you have a minor illness. When you have a fever, your other symptoms will help you determine how serious your illness is.

Normal body temperature

Most people have an average body temperature of about 98.6°F (37°C), measured orally (a thermometer is placed under the tongue). Your temperature may be as low as 97.4°F (36.3°C) in the morning or as high as 99.6°F (37.6°C) in the late afternoon. Your temperature may go up when you exercise, wear too many clothes, take a hot bath, or are exposed to hot weather.

Fever temperatures

A fever is a high body temperature. A temperature of up to 102°F (38.9°C) can be helpful because it helps the body fight infection. Most healthy children and adults can tolerate a fever as high as 103°F (39.4°C) to 104°F (40°C) for short periods of time without problems.

The degree of fever may not indicate how serious the illness is. With a minor illness, such as a cold, you may have a temperature, while a very serious infection may cause little or no fever. It is important to look for and evaluate other symptoms along with the fever.

What you can do

1. DRINK FLUIDS—your mother was right! Fluids thin your mucus, helping it to flow. Hot drinks and soups are especially effective.
2. HUMIDIFY YOUR ENVIRONMENT—moisture helps. Use the shower, a humidifier, or breathe over a bowl of hot water.
3. GET REST—going to work with a cold isn’t necessarily going to make it worse, but keep in mind you are most contagious in the first 48 hours. So stay home if you can.
4. HELP YOUR BREATHING—prop yourself up on pillows.
5. COUGH AND BLOW—blow your nose gently and often, and cough as needed. You want to keep phlegm moving, not suppress it.
6. GARGLE—gargle with salt water to soothe your sore throat. Salt helps sterilize the bacteria in the back of your throat and promotes the healing of inflamed tissues. To make a salt solution, stir ½ teaspoon of salt in a glass of warm water and gargle for 30-60 seconds.
7. DON’T TAKE ANTIBIOTICS—for a cold or the flu unless there’s solid medical evidence that you have a secondary bacterial infection. If you are unsure, see your doctor!
8. TAKE AN OVER-THE-COUNTER (OTC) REMEDY—OTC cold and flu remedies can help relieve symptoms, but do nothing to cure the condition or speed its course. Some may even cause side effects or slow down your recovery. Take single-ingredient products only as needed and as directed. Make sure you read the label warnings and don’t take something if you are unsure you really need it. When in doubt, check with your doctor or pharmacist first.
Acetaminophen—for aches, pains, and fever.
Decongestants—(like Sudafed) can be helpful for daytime congestion.
Nasal Sprays—helpful for congestion, but should not be used for more than three to five days.
Antihistamines—(like Benedryl or Dimetapp) helpful for nighttime congestion. They can help you breathe if you’re having trouble sleeping due to stuffiness.
Cough Products—help suppress dry hacking coughs, but use sparingly. It is better to encourage a productive cough with fluids rather than trying to suppress it.
Other—salt water gargles, hard candy, and especially lozenges help to soothe and lubricate your throat. These remedies can provide temporary relief. However, if you have a severe sore throat, see your doctor.

Be sure to follow these safety tips when you use a nonprescription medicine:

- Carefully read and follow all directions on the medicine bottle and box.
- Do not take more than the recommended dose.
- Do not take a medicine if you have had an allergic reaction to it in the past.
- If you have been told to avoid a medicine, call your doctor before you take it.
- If you are or could be pregnant, do not take any medicine other than acetaminophen unless your doctor has told you to.
- Do not give aspirin to anyone younger than age 20 unless your doctor tells you to.

Symptoms to Watch For During Home Treatment

Use the Check Your Symptoms section to evaluate your symptoms if any of the following occur during home treatment:

- Be sure to check your temperature every 2 to 4 hours to make sure home treatment is working.
- Level of consciousness changes.
- You have signs of dehydration and you are unable to drink enough to replace lost fluids.
- Fever lasts longer than 4 days.
- Other symptoms develop, such as pain in one area of the body, a cough, or urinary symptoms.
- Fever recurs more than once over 3 weeks.
- Symptoms become more severe or frequent.

Information provided by:

Peer Health Advocates
peerhealth@kzoo.edu
https://reason.kzoo.edu/pha/

Wellness Council of America
17002 Mercy Street, Suite 140 | Omaha, NE 68118
Phone: 402.827.3590

WebMD.com