

Fever causing headaches for Aussie parents

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Australian parents need to be educated about managing fever in young children because many give medication incorrectly and often unnecessarily, according to a Queensland University of Technology nursing researcher.

QUT senior research fellow Anne Walsh conducted the first study into how Australian parents' manage childhood fever as part of her PhD.

Her results were published in the latest *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*.

Ms Walsh found that, of more than 400 Queensland parents surveyed, paracetamol was administered too frequently by 4 per cent and ibuprofen by 32 per cent.

She said the finding that 23 per cent administered ibuprofen every four hours instead of the recommended six- to eight-hourly intervals was disturbing.

Ms Walsh expressed concern at the rise over the past decade of the practice of alternating over-the-counter antipyretic medications such as paracetamol and ibuprofen (in products such as Nurofen).

"This is disturbing because our survey revealed that it was very common for parents to give these medications for mild fever and at too frequent doses," Ms Walsh said.

"Given that such a high percentage of parents are giving ibuprofen too frequently, it may be that they are assuming it is the same as paracetamol which can be given four hourly."

The senior research fellow said she was also concerned that, despite two decades of research that proved a mild fever could be beneficial to fighting infection, more than half of parents continued to reduce mild fever unnecessarily.

"There is a consensus in research that fever up to 40°C is beneficial in fighting illness and little indication that there is any need to give medication for a temperature less than 39.0°C, except to relieve pain," Ms Walsh said.

She said it was not parents' fault they were mismanaging fever, as they were just following accepted practice and trying to maintain some control over their children's wellbeing.

However, she said, there was an urgent need for evidence-based education for parents and the health professionals who give them information.

"All parents should learn how to manage fever before their child's first febrile episode," she said.

"Many parents see these medications as having magical qualities such as calming upset children, sedating them or lifting a child's mood.

"However, incorrect use of antipyretics can result in things like liver damage and stomach upset.

"In many cases it would be better if parents first manage fever by giving their children more fluids and rest, and keeping them comfortable."

Ms Walsh said it was important to closely monitor unwell children and seek medical advice if they were feverish under six months; suffered headache, neck stiffness or light hurt their eyes; had breathing difficulties; refused to drink; persistently vomited; were drowsy; suffered pain; had a rash of red-purple spots; or did not improve from mild symptoms within 48 hours.

"Especially in the wake of the recent flu outbreak, it's very important to monitor children and if they do deteriorate quickly then seek medical advice."

Source: Queensland University of Technology

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