

Fevers can be a child's friend: Pediatrician shares what parents need to know about fevers

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For many parents, discovering their child has a fever can be unnerving. It's one of the most common reasons parents call their doctor or bring their child in for medical care. Fevers are just a natural part of many illnesses and, in fact, can be helpful as a child battles an illness.

"My most frequent calls are from worried [parents](#) who want to know how high is too high of a fever. What many parents don't realize is that often, fevers are their [child](#)'s friend," said Hannah Chow-Johnson, MD, Loyola University Health System [pediatrician](#) and assistant professor in the department of pediatrics at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine.

Fevers are not pleasant for kids. They can make them unhappy and fussy. They also force them to slow down, rest and sleep more, which are all necessary for a child to recover from an illness.

"Fevers can actually help your child recover more quickly, especially if he or she is battling a viral illness," Chow-Johnson said. "I often wish thermometers had a gauge that read either 'fever' or 'no fever.' That would definitely help parents who worry if their child has a fever that's too high," Chow said.

She shares some facts to help parents better understand fevers:

- Fevers are safe. A fever is the body's way of controlling its [immune response](#). Your child's body is controlling the temperature and it's going to fluctuate no matter what you do. Don't awaken a child from a [deep sleep](#) to give medications for the fever. Sleep is more important.
- Take oral temperatures when possible and rectal ones when not. Ear, sticker, [pacifier](#) and temporal artery thermometers are not reliable. Stick to a good, old-fashioned digital thermometer for the best accuracy. As far as how frequently a fever needs to be checked, once a day is sufficient.
- There is not a maximum number on the thermometer that means go to the [emergency room](#), unless your child stops drinking, urinating or responding well. But if children are doing all three, parents can monitor them from home.
- Your goal should be your child's comfort, not reducing the fever. Be generous with fluids, ice chips and popsicles. Dress children in light clothing and give tepid baths to help cool them down. Don't use rubbing alcohol as this can be absorbed into the skin. Give fever reducers only if your child feels uncomfortable, not solely to reduce the temperature. And don't alternate fever-reducing medications, as this could lead to overdosing or excessive medication that your child doesn't need.

There are times you should seek medical attention when your child has a fever such as:

- A child who is less than 8 weeks old and has a fever of 100.4 degrees or higher should be seen by a physician immediately
- A child who is undergoing chemotherapy or has a compromised immune system
- If there is no clear source for the child's fever (no cough, runny nose or known pain) and the fever has lasted for 2-3 days

- If a [fever](#) lasts for more than 5 days, see a physician, even if your child looks well.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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