

Temperature, fever and convulsions

What is normal

Everyone's body temperature changes. These changes can be caused by exercise, eating, sleeping and even the time of day.



The average body temperature, taken with a thermometer in the mouth, is 37°C (98.6°F), but anywhere between 36.5°C and 37.2°C (97.7°F and 99°F) can be considered normal. Armpit temperatures are 0.2°C to 0.3°C lower than this.

A fever is a temperature of 38°C (100.4°F) or above.

Looking after your child at home

Not every fever needs medical attention. There are several things you can do to help bring your child's temperature down and make them more comfortable:

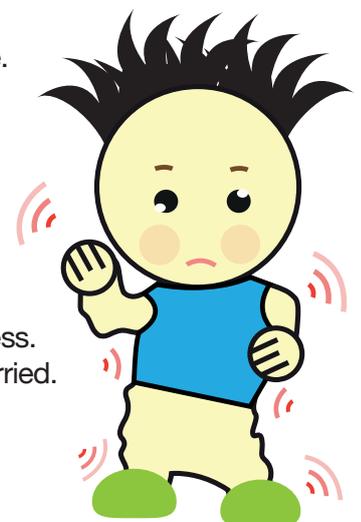
- Keep the room at a comfortable temperature, but make sure fresh air is circulating
- Take your child to the coolest room in the house
- Give your child plenty of cold water to drink to prevent dehydration
- Give your child some ice cubes to suck or ice lollies
- Children with fever should not be under or over dressed. If your child is shivering or sweating a lot, change the amount of clothes they are wearing.



- If your child is shivering, ensure that they are wearing something light against their skin. Do not put on additional layers or wrap them in a duvet. Covering them in a sheet will make them more comfortable and is less likely to overheat them.
- **Do not** sponge your child with water – this will not help to reduce fever.
- If you have an electric fan, this can help cool your child down.

In General Practice it is usual to find that by the time a high proportion of feverish children are brought to the practice or Out of Hours, they have been cooled by the ambient temperature outside.

Some medicines can help to bring down your temperature. Paracetamol and ibuprofen work in this way. Never give aspirin to Children under 16 years of age. Fever is rarely harmful, but at very high temperatures it can cause problems. A high fever may also be a sign of serious illness. Call your doctor if you're worried.



For more information, help and support go to www.choosewellmanchester.org.uk or visit NHS Choices at www.nhs.uk

Choose the right care

Preventing dehydration

Offer your child regular drinks (where a baby or child is breastfed the most appropriate fluid is breastmilk) and watch out for these signs of dehydration:

- Sunken fontanelle (soft spot on a baby's head)
- Dry mouth
- Sunken eyes
- No tears

If you find signs of dehydration encourage your child to drink more fluids and seek further advice if you are worried.

How to check your temperature if you do not have a thermometer

There are some common signs and symptoms when your temperature goes above its normal level. These will vary between individuals and may come and go as long as your temperature is high.

If a thermometer is not available, the following signs and symptoms may be a good indication you have a high temperature:

- Skin feels hot to touch – Place a hand on your forehead or other part of the body and it will feel noticeably hotter than usual and may be either dry or wet from sweat. **NB:** do not feel the hands and feet as these can feel cold when the temperature is high.
- Flushed skin – When you have a temperature your skin will often become flushed (red). This is particularly noticeable on the face, especially the cheeks. However, it may be more difficult to see on darker skin.
- Shivering – As your temperature goes up and down it is common to shiver and feel very cold even when those around you are feeling comfortable
- Feeling hot and cold – Alternating between feeling hot, and maybe sweaty, and cold, and maybe shivering, is an indication that you have a high temperature.
- Other signs can include feeling tired and weak. Children may show no interest in playing. Loss of appetite is common. However, these symptoms on their own do not necessarily indicate a high temperature.

What is a febrile convulsion?

A febrile convulsion is another name for a fit that happens either just before, or whilst, a child has a temperature. About 1 in 20 children aged under 5 will have a febrile convulsion at some point. Although the convulsion may be upsetting for you to watch it does not cause any permanent damage to your child.

What should I do if my child has a febrile convulsion?

- Place your child on their side in a clear space on the floor
- **Do not** try to hold your child during the fit
- **Do not** try to put anything in your child's mouth during the fit - they will not swallow their tongue
- Stay with your child until the febrile convulsion stops - usually in a few minutes
- Lay your child on their side (in the recovery position) while they recover



What should I do if the febrile convulsion does not stop?

If the fit lasts for more than 3 minutes you must dial 999 and call an ambulance. Stay with your child and keep them on their side.



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Choose the right care

What to do next...



Choose care at home if...

- Your child is **over three months old** and has any of the symptoms of a fever but has a temperature below 38°C (100.4°F)
- Keep your child away from nursery or school while they have a fever and tell the school or nursery about the illness
- If in doubt, you can call NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 (or 111 in some areas) for advice



Choose your GP surgery if...

- Your child is **under three months old** and has any of the symptoms of a fever - contact your GP, even if it's in the middle of the night
- You suspect an infection, which might need antibiotic treatment – contact your GP
- The fever is higher than 38.5°C (101.3°F)
- The fever lasts for longer than five days
- Your child has a stiff neck – call your GP, even if it's the middle of the night
- Your child has had a febrile convulsion lasting less than three



Call 999 A&E if...

- Your child's temperature goes above 40°C (104°F)
- Your child is having a seizure that has lasted longer than three minutes and is showing no signs of stopping
- Your child cannot swallow or starts drooling
- Your child has a blotchy red rash that does not fade or change colour when you place a glass against it
- Your child is having breathing difficulties



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Choose the right care