



Management of the Child with Fever

Evidence Based Information Sheets for Consumers

What is evidence based health information?

Just as a detective searches for evidence to solve a crime, so too do health professionals look for evidence to guide their practice. The detective must have evidence to support their case. In a similar fashion, the health care professional must have evidence to support their proposed course of treatment. They search for information that will help them to provide the most effective or beneficial form of care to their patients. Due to the wealth of information available to them, the process of discovering which information is the best can be difficult and time consuming. It would take an enormous amount of time for your doctor to sift through the large amounts of research and information available to them on a particular topic. This is where the Joanna Briggs Institute comes into play. We conduct the 'detective' work, providing them (and you) with the best available evidence.

Evidence Reliability

The evidence related to the topic of each consumer publication produced by the Joanna Briggs Institute is assessed for reliability and quality. We do not rate a procedure or treatment, but the evidence (or research) that is available to support it.

Evidence can play a critical role in any investigation and it is important for detectives to recognise evidence that will provide 'reliable' information to aid in the investigation. This is also the case when assessing health information, as some types of evidence are more reliable than others.

For Joanna Briggs Institute evidence based information for consumers, you can be assured that the best available evidence is utilised. If you would like more information about research and levels of evidence, please contact the Joanna Briggs Institute or visit the research page of our consumer web site.

"The procedures described in this pamphlet must only be used by people who have appropriate expertise in the field to which the procedure relates. The applicability of any information must be established before relying on it. While care has been taken to ensure that this pamphlet summarises available research and expert consensus, any loss, damage, cost, expense or liability suffered or incurred as a result of reliance on these procedures (whether arising in contract, negligence or otherwise) is, to the extent permitted by law, excluded".

What does this mean for consumers?

As consumers of health care it is important to know that your treatment is being based on the best available evidence. It is also important that you are provided with all of the information in order to have greater independence in relation to your own health care decisions and to be involved in the decision making process.

Further information

The Joanna Briggs Institute Consumer Information Program provides up to date literature reviews to ensure your information is based on the best available evidence. The Institute also produces systematic reviews and Best Practice Information sheets aimed at clinicians and health professionals. This means you are provided with the same high standard of publications based on the same information as those working directly in the field.

Contact details

The Joanna Briggs Institute has collaborating centres throughout Australia and overseas. If you would like more information on the Institute, its publications or wish to contact a Joanna Briggs Institute collaborating centre near you, please visit our web site:

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**The best available
evidence...**

**for parents
and carers**

About Fever

What is fever?

Fever is a normal response that shows the body is working to fight an infection. One way the body fights infection is to raise its temperature over 37.6°C (99.7°F). Fever is common in children and most children have an average of four to six fevers in the first two years of their lives. These fevers are usually not dangerous.

What causes fever?

Viral infections are the usual cause of high temperatures. In very few cases (less than 10%) fever indicates a more serious illness.

Is fever dangerous? What about febrile convulsions?

A raised temperature alone is usually not dangerous. Your main concern should be how you can make your child more comfortable.

Some parents worry about febrile convulsions but only a small percentage of children between three months and five years of age will have a febrile convulsion. Although they can last up to 15 minutes and be frightening for a parent, there are usually few after effects.

Some children are more likely to have febrile convulsions than others. For example a child who has had one febrile convulsion is more likely to have another episode.

Giving your child regular drinks and keeping him/her cool is the best treatment for fever. There is no research to date to suggest that giving your child paracetamol will prevent a febrile convulsion.

References

This Consumer Information Sheet has been based on a systematic review and *Best Practice* Information Sheet undertaken by the Joanna Briggs Institute under the guidance of a review panel of clinical experts.

Watts, R., Robertson, J and Thomas, G. 2001 The Nursing Management of Fever in Children. A Systematic Review No. 14, The Joanna Briggs Institute Adelaide.

Seeking advice from a health professional

If you have any concerns about your child's condition you should seek advice from a health professional.

Advice from a health professional is recommended in cases such as:

- your child becoming very irritable
- your child's condition seems to be getting worse quickly
- and other symptoms and signs, like a rash, that might indicate more serious illness.

Seeking advice from the Internet

You should be careful about the information you find on the Internet. This information is not always reliable and may suggest treatments that are outdated and in some cases dangerous. If you do look on the Internet for information you should ask the following questions:

Who created the website?

It should be a well-known and reputable organisation such as a government or educational agency. Be careful of websites that are created by a commercial agency that may be trying to sell their product.

Is the information up-to-date?

Check that there is a date on the website that tells you when the information was put there and if it has been updated or revised at any stage. If the website is credible, the most up-to-date information should be the most reliable.

Is the information written for you?

Some websites are created for health consumers and are therefore written in plain language. These sites may be most useful to you.

The evidence suggests...

What you can do for a child with fever

The main thing you can do is to try to make them comfortable and assist your child's body to fight the infection.

- Encourage your child to drink fluids.
- Remove excess clothing or wrappings.
- If your child enjoys being bathed offer a luke-warm sponge or bath. While it may not reduce the temperature for any length of time, it will not do any harm, and may make the child feel more comfortable.
- If your child becomes upset or shows other signs of discomfort, like shivering, stop bathing or sponging them. Their distress can raise their temperature.

What about medicines?

Medicines like paracetamol will reduce a fever but these should be used with care.

- A single dose of paracetamol can reduce temperature and may make your child more comfortable.
- It is not advisable to give regular paracetamol for mild or moderate fever.
- Particular care should be taken if giving paracetamol to children who are vomiting, not drinking or who have not been eating for some time or who are passing less urine than usual (they may be dehydrated).
- No more than 60mg/kg per day should be given.

If you decide to treat your child with paracetamol follow the instructions carefully and check the use-by date on the label.

Check that you are using children's strength paracetamol and that no other medications the child is taking contains paracetamol. A dropper is more accurate than a spoon to measure the dose for your child.

If you are at all worried about giving the correct dose check with your pharmacist.