

Fever Control (Adult)



A fever is a normal reaction of your body to an illness. The temperature itself often isn't harmful. It actually helps your body fight infections. You don't need to treat a fever unless you feel very uncomfortable.

Home care

Follow these tips to take care of yourself at home:

- If you feel warm, check your temperature.
- Dress in light clothing. This will help you lose extra body heat through your skin. The fever will go up if you wear extra layers or wrap in blankets.
- Fever causes your body to lose water through evaporation. Drink lots of fluids. These include water, juice, clear sodas, ginger ale, or lemonade.

Fever medicines

You can take acetaminophen every 4 to 6 hours if:

- You feel very uncomfortable
- Your oral temperature is 100.4°F (38°C) or higher

If you can't take or keep down oral medicine, ask your pharmacist for acetaminophen suppositories. You don't need a prescription for these.

If the fever doesn't get better within 3 hours after you take acetaminophen, take ibuprofen. If this works, keep taking the ibuprofen every 6 to 8 hours.

If you have chronic liver or kidney disease, talk with your healthcare provider before taking these medicines. Also talk with your provider if you ever had a stomach ulcer or GI (gastrointestinal) bleeding.

If either medicine alone doesn't keep the fever down, you may switch off between the 2 medicines every 3 to 4 hours. But do this only if your healthcare provider has told you to. For example, take ibuprofen at the dose prescribed. Wait 3 hours. If the discomfort and fever is not under control, take acetaminophen as prescribed. Wait 3 hours. Take ibuprofen if needed, and so on. Follow your provider's directions exactly.

Don't give aspirin to anyone younger than age 19 who is ill with a fever. Aspirin can cause a serious condition called Reye syndrome. Although rare, Reye syndrome is a very serious illness that may cause liver and brain damage. It may occur at any age but most often occurs in children younger than age 15. Reye syndrome has been closely linked to the use of aspirin or aspirin-containing medicine during a viral infection.

Follow-up care

Follow up with your healthcare provider if you don't get better after 48 hours.

When to get medical advice

Call your healthcare provider right away if any of the following occur:

- Fever, as directed by your healthcare provider, or:
 - Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or above lasting for 24 to 48 hours

- Fever lasting more than 3 days, even without other symptoms
- Fever that happens after visiting a foreign country
- Fever that happens within a month after visiting a country with malaria. Malaria is a serious illness. A fever can still be malaria even if you took medicine to prevent it. The medicine does not work in all cases.
- Confusion or trouble thinking
- Headache or stiff neck
- Flat, small, purplish red spots on your skin
- Low blood pressure
- Fast heart rate
- Fast (rapid) breathing
- You are pregnant
- You just had surgery, another procedure, or were just discharged from the hospital
- You have a fever and have a weak immune system for any reason, such as stem cell or organ transplant, HIV/AIDS, or cancer. This also includes taking medicines that suppress the immune system (immunosuppressants). These are steroids like prednisone, cancer medicines, and organ transplant rejection medicines. If you are not sure about whether your medicines suppress your immune system, ask your healthcare provider.

Call 911

Someone should call 911 if you:

- Are having trouble breathing or shortness of breath
- Are unresponsive

Important reminder

Call your healthcare provider if you get a fever after visiting a place where infectious diseases are common. Many people pick up a cold or other virus while traveling. This often goes away without a problem. But some places have more serious diseases. Fever with certain other symptoms may mean you have a serious illness. Symptoms to watch for include diarrhea, skin rashes, insect bites, and skin boils, or infections. Your provider may ask you:

- What you did on your trip
- How long you were there
- Where you traveled and where you stayed (hotel, native house, tent)
- What you ate and drank
- If you were bitten by insects or other bugs
- If you swam in freshwater
- If you had sex or got a tattoo or piercing while you were there

Check the CDC website to get more information about specific infectious diseases in the places you have traveled.

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