

A fever can be a helpful and healing part of an acute disease, during a cold perhaps, or one of the more serious 'childhood' illnesses – a positive thing to be encouraged rather than suppressed. By understanding that a fever is a symptom of disease and not a disease in itself we can come to see fevers as allies and not enemies.

Some people have fevers which recur, possibly for years, after illnesses like glandular fever or malaria; these are not to be confused with the fevers we are discussing here and should always be referred to a professional homeopath.

In many acute diseases fevers are an essential part of the healing process but can evoke fear through not understanding their function. A fever is one sign of the body's healing activity. When our bodies become stressed by external or internal events we become susceptible to disease. Typical examples of external stresses are overwork; lack of sleep; an accident; environmental pollution; becoming chilled, overheated or wet through; overindulgence in rich foods/alcohol and so on. Examples of internal or emotional stresses are shock; the death of a close relative or friend; boredom; fear; resentment or any strong feeling which isn't expressed. In a situation where a person is under continued stress a cold or flu may well surface as the body's way of saying "Help!... please take a rest so that I can recharge my batteries and heal myself".

A high temperature generally indicates that the body's defence mechanism is fighting an infection and temperature variations indicate how it is coping. During a fever the healing reactions of the body are speeded up – approximately ten per cent for each one degree rise in Centigrade temperature; the heart beats faster, carrying the blood around the body more quickly; breathing is speeded up, increasing oxygen intake; and perspiration increases, helping the body to cool down naturally. Hormones are released during a fever which stimulate the body to fight disease.

Fever is the body's first-line defence against infection and therefore attempts to 'control' a fever artificially with paracetamol, vitamin C, or even with inappropriate homeopathic remedies, can suppress the body's natural efforts to heal itself.

The ancient Greek doctor, Hippocrates said, "Give me a fever and I can cure the child". A weak child may be endlessly 'sick', neither very ill nor very well, but with no significant rise in temperature. A more robust child whose temperature soars may look and feel very ill, therefore giving more cause for concern, but is usually ill for a shorter period of time and recovers more quickly.

Each person has their own pattern of falling ill and will experience different fever symptoms; one individual may feel hot with a high fever, while another may feel chilly and shiver despite a high temperature. The latter may be irritable and intolerant of any disturbance and need to be kept warm. Another may be aching and restless, may moan and complain. Yet another may sweat profusely, be thirsty and slightly delirious. One person may want company, someone to talk to, and another will want to be alone. Each person with a fever will respond to an individual homeopathic remedy depending on their individual emotional state and general symptoms.

The average normal temperature in a healthy human is said to be 98.4F or 37C, but it can vary quite markedly. Most people, adults and children, can run a fever of up to 104F/40C for a short period – up to several days – with no danger. It is normal for healthy infants and children to throw high fevers (103F/39.5C and over) with an infection. A temperature of 105F/40.5C is cause for serious concern, but it is only when it passes above 106F/41C that there is a risk to life.

Fevers usually peak towards night-time and drop by the following morning, so that a temperature of 104F/40C registered in the evening may recur on subsequent evenings. A drop in temperature in the morning does not mean that the fever is past its peak. It can rise and fall several times over several days before finally returning to normal.

Small children who develop a fever, especially infants under six months old, have to be watched carefully because they are vulnerable to becoming quickly dehydrated. Hallucinations and tantrums in children sometimes accompany high fevers and, although these are distressing they are not dangerous.

## Do

- Take the temperature with a thermometer for an accurate reading. A fever strip (for the forehead) is a rough guide only and a hand held on the forehead is next to useless. A temperature taken by tucking the thermometer tightly under the armpit will read about a half a degree Fahrenheit lower than that taken under the tongue. The thermometer should be left under the tongue or the armpit for at least five minutes. The newer digital thermometers are much easier for young children and give a quick and accurate reading. Always keep spare batteries in the house!
- Provide a calm environment for your feverish patient. This is not a time to go visiting! Encourage a feverish child to rest and read, to listen to tapes and to sleep as much as possible.
- Encourage a feverish patient to drink plenty of fluids or at least sips of water at frequent intervals. Water, lemon and honey or diluted fruit juices, warmed or cold as desired, are best. Breast milk is fine for a nursing baby and is probably all that will be wanted. Children who are reluctant to drink, will often suck on a wet sponge or flannel, especially if the water is warm. Or try an ice cube or frozen fruit juice.
- Avoid tea, coffee, chocolate, alcohol and sugar as they stimulate the system when it needs to rest.
- Immerse a feverish but not desperately ill child in the bath from time to time to bring down the fever. Thirstless children will often drink the bathwater as an added bonus.
- Sponge down with tepid water if the fever goes above 103–104F/40C and your patient feels uncomfortable (hot and sweaty). Expose and sponge one limb at a time until it feels cool to the touch. Dry and replace it under the covers before going on to the next limb. This will help the temperature to drop by one or two degrees Fahrenheit and can be repeated as often as necessary. Sponging the face and forehead alone can also give relief.
- Undress a feverish baby especially if the weather or your house is very hot – small babies throw a fever if they become overheated

and it will quickly revert to normal with undressing and/or a tepid sponging down.

- Respond to your patient's individual needs – in general keep a hot, feverish baby lightly dressed and a chilly, feverish child (who feels cold to the touch and shivers) well covered. Some people feel chilly with a fever and cannot bear to be uncovered, let alone sponged down – even with a high temperature.
- Prescribe homeopathic remedies where the fever is one of a number of symptoms, i.e. where the patient is clearly suffering from say, ear-ache or a sore throat and a fever. If the first symptom to arise is a fever then wait for other symptoms to surface before prescribing for the whole picture. Contain the fever, again if necessary, by sponging down (see above).
- Suppress the fever with Calpol (paracetamol) in an emergency i.e. where the fever rises above 105F/40.5C) or if your child is in severe pain, from say, teething in the middle of the night with the fever and homeopathic first aid prescribing is not helping. The recommended dose of Calpol should never be exceeded. Ring your homeopath or doctor in the morning.
- Watch out for signs of dehydration in infants under six months old, and especially in children who are refusing to drink or who are drinking less than usual:
  - \* Mouth and eyes are dry (no saliva/tears);
  - \* Skin tone is poor; if the skin is pressed it does not spring back;
  - \* The eyes look sunken;
  - \* The fontanelle (soft spot on your baby's head) is sunken;
  - \* The urine is scanty, strong and smelly (there are fewer wet nappies).
  - \* Give a rehydration mixture (available from the chemist) to a baby who is losing a lot of fluid through profuse sweating with the fever especially if it accompanies diarrhoea and/or vomiting. Or make up one of your own by simply mixing a teaspoon of sugar and glucose with half a teaspoon of salt in one pint of water (boiled and cooled) and offer at regular intervals. Some babies will only take small amounts on a spoon and others will only suck on a bottle.

- \* Make sure that your patient has a day or two on foods nutritious and easily digested once the fever has abated and the appetite returned.

#### Don't

Give a homeopathic remedy, say Aconite, Belladonna or Chamomilla, at the first sign of a rise in temperature as this can confuse the remedy picture. Any attempt to interrupt the body's own healing processes is unwise.

#### Never

Suppress a fever in children with aspirin as this has been known to lead to dangerous although rare, complications, in particular Reye's Syndrome, which affects the brain and liver. Symptoms include sudden vomiting some time after the onset of a viral infection, sleepiness, confusion, diarrhoea, and rapid, shallow breathing.

Seek help if

- A baby under six months old has a fever.
- An older child has a fever of over 103.5F/40C that does not respond to sponging and homeopathic treatment within twenty-four hours.
- A person of any age has a fever of 105F/40C or over.
- There is a history of convulsions accompanying fevers.
- Anyone with a fever is also refusing to drink (is thirstless) as dehydration can occur, especially if the fever continues for several days with the patient taking in or keeping down (if there is also vomiting) only small amounts of liquids.
- There is a lack of reaction (listlessness and limpness), which can imply that a serious illness such as pneumonia or meningitis has developed.
- You are worried and feel instinctively that your baby is unwell and needs help.

Keep a close eye on your infant and seek professional help (from your doctor and/or homeopath) if you are worried or concerned at any time.

If you are worried contact your doctor and/or homeopath immediately.

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# Children's Fevers

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