

(1) Facts about Fever

- Except in rare cases, fever is usually the symptom of an illness. What causes concern is the illness rather than the degree of fever. In most cases, fever is a natural immune response to defend against diseases and is not harmful.
- As the temperature regulation mechanism in the brain of children is not fully developed, they are easily influenced by the temperature of the environment. Moreover, dehydration is another cause for the rise in body temperature. Parents should be cautious about the possible risk of dehydration caused by severe vomiting or diarrhea in their children.

(2) Common Misconceptions about Fever

- Patients or their families tend to think that the degree of fever correlates with the severity of illness. In fact, even minor illness can elicit a high fever. On the contrary, a slight rise or even a drop in body temperature may be due to a serious illness;
- People often have excessive worry that fevers will cause brain damage. Actually the cause of brain damage is encephalitis or meningitis, and fever is just one of the symptoms. Except in extreme cases where body temperature rises to 41°C, fever is unlikely to harm the brain. What we need to do is to observe if the patient looks dull or in alerted mental status. Seek medical attention at once if this happens.

(3) Febrile Seizures

- Fever cramps, is also known as febrile seizures or febrile convulsions. It usually occurs in young children under the age of 6 (mostly between 1-2 years old) having a temperature higher than 38°C. The incidence rate of such in children under 5 years of age is 2-5%. About 50% are genetically related, while the others may not have an identifiable cause. Recurrence may occur in about 30% of cases, usually during the first 2.5 years.
- Most children do not have a tendency towards febrile seizures. Therefore, fever will not usually cause seizures. For those who are prone to febrile seizures, their body temperature may rise quickly when they have febrile illness such as common cold, influenza, sore throat or ear infection. In such case, seizures may occur in 2-6 hours, usually manifesting as generalized convulsion which resolves spontaneously within 15 minutes.
- When a child has seizures, parents should remain calm. Position the child on his /her side to maintain an unobstructed airway. Call for help immediately. Meanwhile, use warm water to wipe his/her body to lower the body temperature. Make sure that his/her body is well protected (especially the head) to prevent hitting against hard objects. Moreover, do not use excessive force to restrain his/her convulsive movements to avoid causing fractures. Do not put any hard objects such as spoon into the child's mouth. Do not

forcefully open the child's mouth which may hurt the teeth or jaw, and even choke him/her by tooth falling out.

(4) Care Instructions for Fever

- Wear light clothing and keep bedding light. Drink more water to help the body to cool down;
- Have adequate rest and sleep;
- Maintain proper ventilation in the room. Turn on an electric fan or air-conditioner as appropriate to lower the room temperature and help the patient to cool down;
- Give the child a warm water bath, or wipe his/her body with warm water, for a duration of 10 minutes each time. This can lower the body temperature as the water evaporates from his/her skin (remember not to wipe with alcohol). Antipyretics prescribed by the doctor can be used to keep down the temperature. However, the effect may only be temporary and the temperature may rise again afterwards. When the patient fully recovers, his/her body temperature will go back to normal. Avoid excessive anxiety for the persistence of fever despite medications, and follow the doctor's prescription to control the condition;
- Even for common illnesses, the fever may last for a few days. If the condition does not worsen, the patient can continue the prescription and observe the progress.

(5) Other Signs for Alert

- Other than charting the body temperature when taking care of a fever patient, careful observation for the progress is also important. Apart from fever, prompt medical attention should be sought if unusual symptoms are observed:
 - patient looks dull and groans feebly; for children: prolonged crying or sleep, poor appetite, inactive, unwilling to play, persistent vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal pain;
 - persistent fever higher than 40°C (i.e. 104°F), together with patient discomfort or listlessness. If the patient's temperature rises to 41°C, even in the absence of other symptoms, fever-lowering measures should be adopted promptly and seek medical attention right away;
 - serious dehydration (especially for a child), e.g. dryness of mouth, tongue and mucous membranes, loss of elasticity of the skin, sunken eyeballs, etc.
- In most cases, patients can recover in a few days after taking adequate rest and medications. If not, patients can seek medical attention for reassessment.
- For disease prevention, suitable clothing, a balanced diet and adequate rest should be the rule.