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**What is more dangerous...  
A fever of 101°F or a fever of 104°F?**

The answer is neither. The height of a child's temperature is not a measure of how sick that child is. In fact, fevers are not dangerous except in rare instances. A fever is a healthy response by the body that is needed to kill an infectious agent (virus, bacteria or other microorganism). The height to the temperature is dependent upon what the body is trying to kill. Typically, low grade fevers (101 to 103°F) tend to be viral infections and high grade fevers (103 to 106°F) tend to be bacterial.

When an infection occurs, the body responds by producing more white blood cells (WBC's). These are the cells that destroy bacteria, viruses and remove damaged tissue and irritating materials from the body. Body temperature rises with the production of pyrogens, which speed up the movement of WBC's to the infection site. Therefore, they speed up the healing process. When the body temperature rises above 102 degrees, huge amounts of interferon, a powerful natural antibiotic and antiviral agent, are produced. Thus, a higher fever is necessary to mount additional defenses that are necessary to fight off some infections.

Lowering a fever prevents the body from producing interferon and prevents the body's temperature from getting high enough to kill whatever is causing an infection. Thus, lowering a fever interferes with the body's healing process. This in turn can cause the infection to linger longer or develop complications. It also interrupts the normal immune response, so when the same bug invades the body in the future, it does not know how to respond so it must "start from scratch" in defending itself. Another complication is from the antibiotic or fever reducing medication (tylenol, advil, etc.) in that the body, already in a weakened state, must deal with removing this chemical from itself which places a further strain on the person.

You should note that body temperatures normally fluctuate during any given day. Late afternoon and early evening temperatures are normally higher than in the morning, so one should expect a fever to be a little higher later in the day.

In a child or adult, a rectal temperature is usually 1 degree higher than an oral temperature, and an axillary (underarm) temperature is usually 1 degree lower than an oral reading. In babies there is only a slight variation between each of these temperatures, so an axillary reading is quite adequate to determine the temperature of an infant.

An individual may have an increase in temperature for reasons other than an infection. These include:

- digesting a heavy meal
- during ovulation in pubescent teenagers
- as a side effect to some medications such as antihistamines

Untreated fevers that are caused by viral or bacterial infections do not rise unchecked and will not reach 106°F. There is a mechanism built in to the body that will prevent an infection induced temperature from reaching a height that can cause damage. Current research now indicates that a temperature can reach 108°F in a child and not be harmful. The biggest risk with fever is dehydration. Liquids, preferably water, should be consumed at a rate of 8 oz./hr. I discourage fruit juices as they are high in natural sugar which tends to suppress the immune system. In case of vomiting or diarrhea, you will need to replenish electrolytes so a drink such as Pedialyte or Gatoraid is recommended. Ginger ale is option as well. Do not over dress an individual with a fever. They should be dressed in the same amount of clothes that you find comfortable. This is especially important for infants. If they are wrapped tightly in a blanket, the heat can not escape from the body and their temperature will rise further. Infants are also unable to cast off excess clothes or blankets or to let you know they are hot.

There are instances when temperature regulation by the body is seriously impaired, and can lead to dangerously high temperatures in the body. These include poisoning, encephalitis, brain lesions or heat stroke. When can a fever be dangerous? In most circumstances it is not unless:

- it persists for more than 3 days
- it occurs in a child under 3 months of age (obstetric complication)
- it is associated with vomiting, extreme listlessness or confusion
- it is associated with extreme neck stiffness or difficulty breathing
- it is associated with a persistent cough lasting several days
- there is loss of consciousness

A common misconception among parents is that a high fever will cause convulsions. Convulsions are not due to fever height, but to how rapidly the temperature rose. It is estimated that only 4 percent of children with high fever experience fever related convulsions. In these instances, by the time you realize the child has a fever, they have already had a convulsion or the danger period for a convulsion to occur has passed. In most instances this is limited to those under 5 years of age. Those children who have experienced convulsions prior to age five rarely have them after the age of five. Convulsions are not life threatening and will not result in physical damage. If a convulsion occurs, take a few steps to protect your child from injury.

1. Place the child on his side.
2. Keep him from hitting his head on anything hard or sharp.
3. Place a soft, firm object (folded leather glove, billfold, etc. (NOT your finger) between his teeth so he does not bite his tongue.
4. Call you medical doctor to inform him of what happened.
5. Do not give any food or drink for one hour after the incident. They will be too drowsy and can choke. Expect them to sleep for a while.

Chiropractic care during a fever or illness helps to remove any nerve interference between the brain and the body so that the nervous system may better regulate the fever. A body without spinal nerve stress (subluxation) will work at a greater efficiency rate than it did before the adjustment. Afterwards, the fever may go down, stay the same, or rise a bit depending on what the body needs to best fight off the infection. Remember, if the body is working better, it may now be able to fight better which means a higher temperature. This does not mean that the person is getting sicker, but rather they are showing a healthier response.

When a fever occurs, it is always best to let it run its course so the body can do its best job to fight the infection naturally. It should be noted that a study done in 1982 showed the ability of white blood cells to engulf and destroy bacteria is inhibited by antibiotics. It also showed a delay in the ability of white cells to move to the infection site and an inhibition of antibody production.

### References

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