



COLORADO ACADEMY OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS

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Myths & Fact: FEVERS

Fevers are commonly misunderstood, resulting in "fever phobia." What is a fever? It's actually a natural response of the body to help fight infection. Knowing about fevers, such as when it's necessary to treat one and how to treat it safely, affects care decisions.

MYTH: Immediate action must be taken to "break" a fever.

FACT: It is not always mandatory to treat a fever, even one as high as 104 degrees. Treatment is typically indicated for reducing the miserable feeling that accompanies the fever. However, watch for additional symptoms such as decreased fluid intake, decrease amount or frequency of urination, and/or a significant decrease in activity level, especially in infants and children. These symptoms may signal dehydration, which is a sign of a worsening illness and the time to contact your family doctor.

Signs and symptoms such as these are important at all ages, but the young and the elderly are at higher risk of more serious outcomes secondary to dehydration. Finally, any fever - temperature of 100.4 or greater - found in an infant two months of age or younger should be reported to your family doctor.

MYTH: Most parents (people) administer correct dosages of pain relievers.

FACT: This is false. Accidental overdoses are a major concern today. Studies indicate that half of all parents do not administer a correct dosage when treating fever. To further complicate correct dosing, acetaminophen is a common component of many over-the-counter cough and cold remedies. Doses of nonaspirin fever-reducing and cold medicines, such as Tylenol, and ibuprofen are based on weight so it is crucial to read dosage information on packaging.

MYTH: Treating a fever will prevent seizures.

FACT: This is not true. Febrile seizures are convulsions associated with fevers and typically occur in infants and small children. Currently, studies show no evidence that reducing a fever prevents these seizures. In fact, it is thought by some that it is a rapid change in temperature that triggers a febrile seizure.

MYTH: Fevers as high as 104 degrees cause brain damage.

FACT: This is a medical myth. Children are notorious for having fevers as high as 104 degrees and there is no evidence that this will cause permanent damage.

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