

# Health Talk: Fever or Febrile Convulsion

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I have received many a call and spoken to many a panicked mother because of a child suffering from high fever. The human body maintains its temperature at 98.4 degrees Fahrenheit or 37 degrees Centigrade (oral). Normal temperatures range from 97.6 degrees C to 99.6 degrees C. Fever is simply a reaction of the body to an infection. Children tend to run higher temperatures which are not related to the severity of the illness. Fever raises body temperature and the body produces sweat to cool it.



The heat from the fever makes more water evaporate from the skin and also increases body metabolism whereby all systems work faster-heart rate quickens,

respiration increases, throat and mouth get dry. This exhausts the water and blood glucose levels in the body causing weakness, lethargy and nausea. In children, it can lead to dehydration very rapidly.

## SYMPTOMS

High temperature which may be accompanied with body ache, dry skin, headache, exhaustion, weakness, nausea or vomiting. When the temperature rises very quickly, the child may go into a fit or have a convulsion. During a convulsion, hands, face and limbs tighten, eyes may roll up, and the child may seem unfocussed. This is called a Febrile convulsion. It is very frightening to the parents but usually does no harm to the child or the brain.

## CAUSES

Rise in temperature is due to the body's reaction to infections such as the following.

- Viral (flu, cold, measles, dengue).
- Bacterial (for e.g. an infection in the ear or respiratory tract, a urinary or gastric infection or dysentery or typhoid).
- Parasitic (for e.g. malaria).
- Prolonged exposure to heat (heat exhaustion, heat stroke, dehydration).

Heat exhaustion occurs when one is exposed to high temperatures. This results in a lot of water loss from the body in the form of sweat making it

difficult for the body to cool down. It causes fatigue, weakness, dizziness, nausea and restlessness. Heat stroke occurs when there is no water in the body to sweat out. The body gets hot and dry, the face becomes red and the person can get confused, delirious and may even lose consciousness.

## CURE

A good number of fevers are of viral origin, which have to run their own course and usually work through the body in two to five days. You can add to the recovery process by doing the following:

- Resting and maintaining the body's defenses are the best cures and can be achieved through a steady supply of extra nutritious fluids such as small amounts of lukewarm, mildly sweetened diluted juices, sherbets, lemonades, soups, broths or even plain water.
- Drinks should be between two to six ounces at a time and at frequent intervals of 15-60 minutes. When fever is higher, frequency of fluid intake should be increased. This is very important in children.
- In cases of heatstroke, treatment aims at cooling the body rapidly by giving a bath or with wet sponges and replenishing water and electrolytes lost in sweating.
- You should try to give fluids while the child is asleep as well. Raise her at an angle, encouraging her to drink and help her lie back down.
- Applying wet towels (room temperature) on the forehead, face, ears and back of the neck is done if the child is restless. Wetting the hair also helps.
- If hands and feet are cooler and the head very

hot, sponge down the head immediately. It may be a precursor of febrile convulsion. Sponge head, give fluids and warm up feet and hands by rubbing. Give medication to bring fever down.

- If temperature is too high, keep a wet pack of towels on the head, back of the neck and under the armpits, it helps in lowering the temperature.
- In febrile convulsions, cooling down the head stops the convulsion. Fits can occur at any temperature.
- Food given during fever should be easy to digest such as bread or toast with jam, pasta etc. Milk products, eggs and meat are to be restricted. (These are high protein foods which take a longer time to digest and thus produce more heat in the body.)
- A tepid water bath for 15 minutes in cases with heat exposure helps to bring the fever down.
- You should seek appropriate treatment for bacterial and parasitic infections with medical consultation.

## PREVENTION

When going out in the sun, drink plenty of water, use a sun hat or an umbrella and wear loose and light clothes. Take anti parasitic medicines and lotions when traveling to areas prone to certain diseases. Keep immunity levels up by adopting a healthy diet, taking adequate rest, doing breathing exercises and drinking plenty of water.



## Herbs to Restore Your Health

## Simple Steps to a Healthier You

Various herbs may be put together and used to bring out their antiseptic properties when fevers are prolonged and are of unknown origin. Holy basil (tulsi) - basil has a volatile oil like camphor and has antiseptic and healing properties.

*Boil 20 leaves of basil with a tsp of crushed ginger in 250 ml water. Take two to three times a day.*

*Alternatively grind basil leaves (stem) and peppercorns together and roll into small pills. Take orally twice daily. This helps in toxic fevers (pepper is hot, and anti septic and induces sweating)*

*Citrus fruit seeds, especially seeds of grape fruit, have antiseptic and antibiotic properties. Extract juice along with seeds and drink twice daily for maximum benefit. May be sweetened.*

*Boil 20 leaves of basil with crushed cardamom. Sweeten with sugar. Drink it with water or diluted milk two to three times a day.*

*Boil basil with a pea sized piece of ginger and two to three crushed peppercorns, boiled and taken with sugar, milk and honey produces heat in the body and is advised in fevers due to cold.*

*Boil 20 leaves of basil with half a tsp of black pepper powder in 250 ml of water, take sweetened twice a day. This is prophylactic for malarial infections.*

*Fenugreek  
One tsp of fenugreek seeds, boiled in a cup of water, taken with a little ginger or lemon juice and honey improves appetite in fevers.*