Fever in Adults Treatment

Self-Care at Home

You can make the diagnosis of fever by taking your temperature with a thermometer. In an adult, the thermometer is placed in the mouth or rectum (use a rectal thermometer). In general, a fever can be treated with any nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory agent such as ibuprofen (Motrin) or with acetaminophen (Tylenol). Both medications help control pain and fever. Alternating doses of each will also work and prevent accidental overdose. At times, a combination of both acetaminophen and ibuprofen will be needed to stop the fever.

Aspirin is not the first choice for fever reduction. It may be toxic in large doses in adults or cause Reye syndrome in children.

- Ibuprofen comes in 200-mg tablets purchased over the counter at a drug store. You may take 1-2 tablets every 4 hours to decrease your temperature. Use the lowest possible dose.
  - Side effects of ibuprofen include nausea and vomiting, which may be prevented if the medication is taken with food. Rare side effects include diarrhea, constipation, heartburn, and stomach pain. People with stomach ulcers or kidney disease, pregnant women, and those with an aspirin allergy should avoid ibuprofen.
  - Common brand names of ibuprofen include Advil, Motrin, and Nuprin. Read the product label for specific ingredients described as ibuprofen.

- Acetaminophen also prevents a fever from occurring. It comes in 325 mg tablets or 500 mg tablets over the counter. Again, 1-2 tablets every 4 hours should be used to eliminate a fever.
  - Side effects are rare, but some people are allergic to the medication. Extremely large doses (overdose) may cause liver failure. Therefore, people with liver disease and chronic alcohol users should avoid this medication.
  - Common brand names of acetaminophen are Aspirin Free Anacin, Feverall, Genapap, Panadol, Tempra, and Tylenol. Read the product label for specific ingredients described as acetaminophen.
• A fever can cause you to become very dehydrated. Drink lots of fluids. Attempts to cool the skin may only make you more uncomfortable. This may also cause shivering, which will actually increase your body temperature if the fever is being caused by an infection. Further therapy depends on the cause of the fever and the accompanying symptoms. Basic cold symptoms can be treated with over-the-counter medications.
• If the fever is caused by exposure to hot weather or overexertion, the technique is different from treating any other fever. Neither acetaminophen nor ibuprofen will be effective. The person needs to be cooled immediately. If the person is confused or unconsciousness, seek emergency medical help immediately. While waiting for help, remove the person from the hot environment and remove his or her clothes. The body should be cooled with a wet sponge, and a fan should be directed over the person.

Medical Treatment

The treatment of a fever depends on its cause. In most cases, except hyperthermia, acetaminophen or ibuprofen can be given to lower the temperature. Fluids may be given by mouth or intravenously to prevent dehydration, if necessary.

• Viral illnesses usually resolve on their own. Medications to help with specific symptoms can be given. These may include medications to lower fever, help with congestion, soothe a sore throat, or control a runny nose. Viruses that cause vomiting and diarrhea may require intravenous fluids and medications to slow down the diarrhea and stop nausea. A few viral illnesses can be treated with antiviral medication. Herpes and the influenza virus are examples. If the person is able to drink fluids and the symptoms are mild, he or she will be able to go home.
• Bacterial illnesses require a specific antibiotic that depends on the type of bacteria found or where it is located in the body. The physician will determine whether the person is admitted to the hospital or sent home. This decision is based on the illness and the person's other medical conditions.
• Most fungal infections can be treated with an antifungal medication.
• Drug-induced fever is eliminated when the medication is stopped.
• A blood clot requires admission to the hospital and blood thinners.
• Any person with an illness that inhibits the immune system will be evaluated closely and usually admitted to the hospital.
• Environmental heat exposure requires aggressive cooling in the Emergency Department. The person's clothes will be removed, a cooling fan and cool mist will be used, and his or her vital signs will be monitored closely. Hyperthermic people will be admitted to the hospital.