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FEVER PHOBIA: UNDERSTANDING THE MYTHS

Misconceptions about the dangers of fever are commonplace. Unwarranted fears about harmful side effects from fever cause lost sleep and unnecessary stress for many parents. Let the following facts help you put fever into perspective.

MYTH: All fevers are bad for children.

FACT: Fevers turn on the body's immune system. Fevers are one of the body's protective mechanisms. Most fevers are good for children and help the body fight infection. Use the following definitions to help put your child's level of fever into perspective.

100°-102°F	Low-grade fevers are beneficial. Try to keep the fever in this range.
102°-104°F	Moderate-grade fevers are beneficial.
>104°F	High fevers cause discomfort, but are harmless.
>105°F	Very high fevers have a higher risk of being caused by bacterial infections.
>108°F	The fever itself can be harmful.

MYTH: Fevers cause brain damage, and fevers over 104°F are dangerous.

FACT: Fevers with infections don't cause brain damage. Only body temperatures over 108°F can cause brain damage. Fortunately, the brain's thermostat keeps untreated fevers below this level. The body temperature only goes excessively high with high environmental temperatures (e.g., confined in a closed car.)

MYTH: Anyone can have a febrile seizure.

FACT: Only 4% of children ever have a febrile seizure.

MYTH: All fevers need to be treated with fever medicine.

FACT: Fevers only need to be treated if they cause discomfort. Often, fevers between 102°F and 104°F cause discomfort.

MYTH: Without treatment, fevers will keep going higher.

FACT: Fevers from infection top out at 105°F or 106°F or lower, because of the brain's thermostat.

MYTH: With treatment, fevers should come down to normal.

FACT: With treatment, fevers usually come down 2° or 3°F, but may not normalize unless the temperature was not very elevated before the fever medicine was given.

MYTH: If the fever doesn't come down (if you can't "break the fever"), the cause is serious.

FACT: Fevers that don't respond to fever medicine can be caused by viruses or bacteria. It doesn't relate to the seriousness of the infection.

MYTH: If the fever is high, the cause is serious.

FACT: In general, the height of the fever does not relate to the seriousness of the illness. If your child looks very sick, the cause may be serious.

MYTH: The exact number of the temperature is very important.

FACT: How your child looks and acts is what is important.

MYTH: Temperatures between 98.6°F and 100°F are low-grade fevers.

FACT: The normal body temperature fluctuates throughout the day and often peaks in the later afternoon or evening.

- A reading of 99.4°F is just the average rectal temperature. It normally can change from 98.4°F in the morning to a high of 100.3°F in the late afternoon.
- A reading of 98.6°F is just the average oral temperature. It normally can change from a low of 97.6°F in the morning to a high of 99.5°F in the late afternoon.