

# Children's pain and fever

Pain and fever are common symptoms of many childhood medical conditions. Pain and fever can make a child feel miserable. There are medicines and non-medicine ways to help your child feel better. Ask a doctor, pharmacist or nurse for advice.

## Pain

### Causes

Children of all ages feel pain. Pain is usually caused by injury or illness, but sometimes children feel strong emotions and stress as pain (e.g. stomach ache). Pain can frighten a child, and fear can make pain worse. If a child complains of pain, take them seriously.

### Signs

It can be hard to know when a child, especially a young child, is in pain. Changes in a child's mood and behaviour can be signs of pain. A child may show pain by:

- what they say
- what they do (e.g. cry, hold the sore part, stop playing, eat less, sleep less, become quiet or irritable)
- how their body is reacting (e.g. pale, sweating, fast pulse).

A parent's instincts can also help them know when their child is in pain.

### Treatment

Medicines can help relieve pain, but there are also non-medicine ways to help your child manage pain. For example:

- Give your child plenty of cuddles and attention.
- Let your child know it is okay to cry when they are in pain.



- Let your child tell you about their pain and their feelings.
- Distract your child with something they enjoy (e.g. games, books, television).
- Cold or heat treatments (get medical advice first).
- If your child is teething, try giving him/her a teething ring to chew on.

## Fever

Normal body temperature is about 37 degrees Celsius. It varies a bit during the day and in different areas of the body. In children, fever usually means a body temperature above 38 degrees Celsius. You can measure your child's temperature with a thermometer. Ask a doctor, pharmacist or nurse for advice.

### Causes

Fever can be caused by a number of conditions. The most common cause is infection, and in children most fevers are caused by virus infections. Children can also get a fever after their childhood vaccinations. Fever is a natural body response that helps fight infection.

Fever does not always mean serious illness. Fever is more likely to be a sign of serious illness if the child is younger than 3 months of age.

### Signs

A child with a fever will often feel unwell and look unwell.

They may also:

- feel hot to touch
- have a flushed face
- have sweaty skin
- shiver

- have chattering teeth
- have a fast heart beat and pulse
- breathe faster than normal.

A child with a fever may also become dehydrated unless they drink plenty of fluid, especially water.

### Treatment

Most fevers are not harmful, but fever can make a child feel miserable. Medicines that reduce fever can help make your child more comfortable. If your child seems happy, there is no need to treat a fever with medicine.

There are non-medicine ways to help your child feel better. For example:

- Give your child plenty of cuddles and attention.
- Give your child enough clothes and blankets, so they are not sweating or shivering.
- Give your child plenty of drinks. If your child is less than 6 months old give extra cooled, boiled water, breast feeds or bottles.

## Febrile convulsions

A febrile convulsion is a seizure (fit) related to a fever. It is usually caused by a rapid rise in body temperature rather than a high temperature alone. Febrile convulsions usually occur in children under 6 years of age, but are not common. Most febrile convulsions last less than 5 minutes and do not harm the child. You cannot prevent febrile convulsions by giving your child a medicine to reduce their fever.

If your child has a fever, do not try to cool him/her with air (e.g. a fan) or water (e.g. baths or sponging). This will not stop the fever and can cause other problems.

## Medicines

Paracetamol and ibuprofen are non-prescription medicines that can be safely given to most children to relieve pain and reduce fever. If you need to give a medicine to your child, carefully follow the dose and directions on the pack. You can buy paracetamol and ibuprofen, and also get advice about their use, from a pharmacist.

### Paracetamol

Paracetamol can relieve mild to moderate pain and reduce fever. There are different paracetamol products for children of different ages. Paracetamol tablets, soluble tablets, liquids and suppositories are available. Paracetamol is not suitable for children younger than one month of age. It has a low risk of side effects and other problems when used correctly.

### Giving medicine to a child

- Always use the right product for the child's age.
- Always calculate the correct dose based on your child's weight.
- Always use a calibrated syringe or medicine cup to measure the dose.
- Keep a record of all doses given.
- Do not give a higher dose or give the dose more often than recommended on the pack.

## Ibuprofen

Ibuprofen is an anti-inflammatory medicine that can relieve mild to moderate pain, reduce swelling and reduce fever. There are different ibuprofen products for children of different ages. Ibuprofen liquids and tablets are available. Ibuprofen is not suitable for children younger than 3 months of age, or children with some medical conditions.

**Note:** Aspirin may cause serious side effects in children. Do not give aspirin to children under 16 years of age unless advised by a doctor.

## Important

Get medical advice if your child:

- has fever and is less than 3 months old
- has a temperature of 39°C or more
- has pain or a fever for longer than 2 days
- has repeated fevers
- has pale, mottled, blue or purple skin, or a rash
- is more sleepy than usual or not responding
- has an unusual or constant cry
- is not eating or drinking much
- has signs of dehydration (e.g. thirst, dark or little urine, dry mouth, sunken fontanelle)
- has a seizure
- has a stiff neck or light hurts their eyes
- is breathing different to normal
- has constant or severe pain.

## For more information

### Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: [www.healthdirect.org.au](http://www.healthdirect.org.au)

### NPS MedicineWise

#### Medicines Line

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: [www.nps.org.au](http://www.nps.org.au)

### Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

### The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

***Pharmacists are medicines experts.  
Ask a pharmacist for advice when  
choosing a medicine.***

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