



INFANT ILLNESS

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Having a newborn is a very exciting time for parents. However, infant illnesses such as coughs, colds, and diarrhea can create worry. As a parent or caregiver, you want to feel confident in how you are handling these situations, ultimately making sure your child is comfortable and safe. Here are some strategies for appropriately navigating common illnesses and tools to help your child feel better sooner.

UNDERSTANDING FEVERS

One of the most common symptoms of infant illnesses is fever. While understandably worrisome for parents, fevers are one of the many ways the body protects itself against viruses and bacteria. Fevers create an environment that is toxic to infectious organisms, and are associated with a boost in white blood cell count (the "soldiers" of the immune system), increased heart rate (helpful to circulate those soldiers), and the fatigue and lethargy that prompt your child to rest and recover. A fever is a sign that the body is doing exactly what it needs to do. Fevers due to infection do not typically get high enough to cause neurological damage. Some children will be susceptible to febrile seizures (a seizure caused by a rapid increase in body heat) however incidence is low and even these have not been shown to cause damage.

While the fever itself should not cause worry, a higher fever may be an indicator of a more serious cause of illness. Most common childhood illnesses are viral. They cause low fevers and are generally benign and self-limiting, although they certainly can cause distress (think ear infections and croup). A bacterial infection may be more dangerous; a higher fever may indicate the need for medical care, particularly if there are other concerning symptoms (see below).

There is no need to suppress a fever! When acetaminophen and ibuprofen are used to reduce fever and alleviate discomfort, the entire immune response is suppressed, potentially prolonging the illness. By allowing the body to do its work – marked by the fever running its course – you may be helping to promote recovery. There are many ways to help an ill child feel more comfortable without using a fever suppressing medication. Read on!

WHEN TO WORRY

So if fever alone shouldn't cause worry, what should? Assessing your child overall is more important than the number on the thermometer (although an infant under three months of age with a fever should seek immediate medical care).

Infant Illness RISK GUIDE

| CONCERN | LOW RISK (keep a watchful eye) | MEDIUM RISK (seek prompt medical attention) | HIGH RISK (needs urgent care) |
|---------|--|--|---|
| FEVER | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skin, lips and tongue are pink and plump • Responds to you normally • Stays awake or is able to easily waken • Cries normally • Mouth and eyes are moist and plump • Less active than usual | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pale complexion • Doesn't respond normally; takes a while to wake up; lethargic • Increased breath rate • Increased heart rate • Mouth is dry • Not nursing/eating/drinking well • Fever for over 5 days • Signs of swelling or pain • Skin rash | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than 3 months of age • Pale, blue or grey complexion • Not responding; does not wake or stay awake • Weak, high-pitched or continuous cry • Grunting or sounds of distress • Struggling for breath • Decrease in urination • Bulging or sunken fontanelle • Neck stiffness • Neurological changes or seizures |

SO WHAT DO I DO?

Barring signs of serious infection that requires medical attention, the goal is to help your child be as comfortable as possible while allowing her body to take care of the illness on its own. Here are some tools to help you appropriately treat common concerns:

| TREATMENT | REASONS FOR USE | HOW TO USE |
|---|---|--|
| TLC | Sick little ones are uncomfortable, cranky and need a lot of extra love. Cuddling, story-reading, and back-tickling occupy them while their bodies rest. Make sure their clothes and bedding allow them to regulate their temperature well. | Baby should be dressed comfortably in lightweight, breathable clothing |
| FLUIDS | Infants typically have a decrease in appetite when not feeling well, and lose more fluids when they have a fever or diarrhea, so it is important to ensure they are getting appropriate nutrition and hydration. | Continue to offer age-appropriate fluids - breast milk, water, homemade vegetable or bone broth, smoothies or soups. Herbal teas contribute therapeutic benefits too! |
| MAGIC SOCKS | Helps promote circulation, allowing the white blood cells to target the cause of infection. | Put cold, wet socks on child's feet. Cover with dry thermal (wool or fleece) socks or booties. Tuck them into bed. The socks will be warm and dry by morning. |
| NASAL OR BREASTMILK IRRIGATION & BULB SYRINGE | Helps to clear a stuffy nose. | Salt water helps dilute mucus to make it easier to clear. Breastmilk does the same, and is rich in antibodies that help target the infection. Irrigation products designed for infants can be purchased at the pharmacy and/or a few drops of breastmilk can be dripped into the child's nose. Diluted or not, mucus can be removed using a simple bulb syringe found in any pharmacy. |
| STEAM INHALATION | Helps to clear the nose and sinuses; may alleviate a cough. | Turn on shower to hottest setting; close door to create a steam filled room; bring infant into the room for approximately 10 minutes. |
| HERBAL TEAS | Teas made from plants such as Elderberry, Chamomile, Catnip, Lemon balm and Peppermint are anti-microbial, calming and support the immune system, and allow a fever to run its course in a healthy way. | Pour 1L boiling water over 3 heaping Tbsp of dry herb. Steep until cool enough to drink or touch. Add to bath water, soups, or give to child directly as a tea. Even infants can safely take these teas from a cup or using a dropper (dose of 1-2 eye droppers every few hours to children under 1, 1/4-1 cup every few hours to toddlers and older children). |
| CASTOR OIL BELLY RUBS | The digestive tract is richly supplied with lymphatic tissue – a key part of the immune system. Castor oil is absorbed across an infant's skin and promotes immune activity. | Warm a small amount of cold-pressed castor oil in your hands; gently massage baby's tummy, moving your hands in a clockwise direction; leave the oil on when you dress him. Rub it into the chest as well if there is also a cough. |
| SPONGE BATH | If there are no concerning symptoms, but the fever is higher than your comfort level, this can help bring the temperature down without suppressing the rest of the immune response. | Using lukewarm water use washcloth to slowly bathe child; adding strong herbal teas to the bath water can add therapeutic benefit! |

Note: Essential oils such as eucalyptus should not be used with infants as they can be toxic. Honey also is not recommended to be ingested by infants until approximately one year of age.

It is natural to feel concerned about your child getting sick. Knowing when to worry, and having some tricks up your sleeve, will enable you and your infant to sail through the most common childhood illnesses. •