

During your baby's first two years, she is likely to get sick. When your baby is sick, she can't blow her nose, can't scratch her itchy throat, and can't tell you what hurts. No one likes to see a little baby suffering. When your baby comes down with a fever, a runny nose, cough, or a runny diaper, you will need to do something to help her. This brochure will cover what bothers babies the most and will give you simple tools to make home treatment easier.

## Fevers

While you can often tell that a baby is warm just by touching them, you should still take their temperature to know if they have a fever. The easiest way to take your child's temperature is by using a digital forehead scanner or by taking your baby's armpit temperature. Gently lift her arm and wipe her armpit dry. Gently place the bulb of the thermometer into the fold of the armpit. Hold her arm flat against her chest. Allow three minutes if your thermometer doesn't have a beep alert when it is done. The armpit (axillary) method is not quite as accurate as a rectal reading, but it will give you a good enough reading to know if your baby has a fever. Add one degree Fahrenheit to the measured temperature when taking an axillary reading.

A temperature reading of greater than 100.4 degrees means that your child has a fever. When your baby has a fever, it is because there is a fight going on inside her body. A fever is the body's normal response to an underlying infection. When a baby has a fever, parents worry. Half the calls to baby doctors are because of fevers. Knowing when and when not to worry will serve you in helping your sick baby.

## Treating Your Baby's Fever

Before you call your doctor at the first sign of a hot forehead, try to assess your baby's level of discomfort. If your baby is fussy and uncomfortable then try the following:

- Give pain medicine, such as Acetaminophen if your baby is fussy and uncomfortable. **Do not use aspirin to treat your baby's fever.** Pay close attention to the dosage instructions on the box or to your provider's instructions.
- Keep your baby cool and comfortable. Don't over bundle her while she is feverish. Keep her room comfortably cool. Give your baby extra fluids to replace what is lost through sweating and rapid breathing.
- Feed the fever. Your baby is using a lot of extra energy getting well. She probably won't want to eat a lot but encourage snacking and nibbling throughout the day.
- Use cool washcloths or a lukewarm bath to help make your baby feel more comfortable.

## When to Call the Doctor

The way your baby is acting is a better indicator of how sick he is than the actual degrees on the thermometer. If you feel worried enough to call your provider, he will want to know when the fever began, how it has progressed, any other symptoms, what you have done to treat it, and your level of worry.

**You should call your provider immediately if any of the following are true:**

- Any fever greater than 100.4 degrees in an infant who is less than three months of age.
- If your child's fever is higher than 104 degrees or lasts longer than four days.

- If your baby is not eating or drinking, is showing signs of dehydration (like not urinating much, sweating, drinking well, or making tears), is becoming excessively tired, has severe pain, has difficulty breathing, or is worrying you.
- If your baby has signs of a bacterial infection, such as ear pain, cough, significant sore throat in the absence of a cough, or bloody, foul-smelling urine.<sup>1</sup>

## Treating a Cold

Most children get eight to ten colds in their first two years. A cold will cause your baby's nose to run, and she may also develop a low fever of 101–102 degrees, watery eyes, and aches. Sometimes colds progress into more serious illnesses, so it's important to monitor your child. They usually clear up within seven to ten days. The thick mucus is what causes the most discomfort. Clearing the nose and thinning the secretions are the best things you can do. Use saline drops in the nose and suction to clear excess mucus, especially right before feeding to help your baby nurse longer. Use a vaporizer to help keep your baby's nose from drying out. Give extra fluids while your baby is sick. Only give fever and pain medication, if necessary.

### When to Call the Doctor

Call your provider if your baby is under three months of age, has trouble breathing, and is not staying hydrated. Call your provider if the cold isn't getting better after four days or significantly worsens after initially getting better.

## Coughs

Coughs are a nuisance and keep everyone awake. Cold, allergies, and the after-effects of colds are the main culprit, but other reasons can cause a cough too. Follow the same advice for thinning the secretions that was given for colds. Clear the air in your home of dust, allergens, and all smoke. Never give over-the-counter cough medicines to a baby.

### When to Call the Doctor

Daytime coughs usually do not require medication; however, if the cough is keeping baby from resting at night, or lasts a very long time, then call your provider. Call your provider if your baby develops a fever, has wheezing or irregular breathing, a fast heart rate, drowsiness, vomiting, or other concerning symptoms.

## Diarrhea

When the intestinal lining becomes irritated, it heals very slowly. Diarrhea is the liquid stool that results from infections, colds, food intolerances, and antibiotic treatment. Most of the time diarrhea is just an annoyance and will clear up on its own.

### Treating Diarrhea

Determine the cause. Have you recently added a new food or changed formulas? Does your baby have a cold or other virus causing diarrhea?

Determine how serious. Check for signs of dehydration. Is your baby losing weight? Is her mouth dry? Is her diaper remaining dry? Is her urine dark yellow with an odor? Are her eyes sunken? Is her soft spot sunken?

It is not necessary to stop feeding a baby if they have vomiting or diarrhea, but be sure to offer fluids very frequently so that he stays well hydrated.

Prevent dehydration. Offer fluids such as water, diluted juice, or herbal tea very frequently. For moderate to severe cases of diarrhea, consider using an oral electrolyte solution, such as Pedialyte. Check with your provider first for how much your baby needs and for what brand they recommend.

Introduce regular feeding. During the one-to-six weeks of healing following a course of diarrhea, continue to serve a well-balanced diet. Avoid all full-strength juice during this time because it may aggravate diarrhea.

### **When to Call the Doctor**

Call your provider for any signs of dehydration. Call your provider if your baby has lost more than 5 percent of her body weight or if she is becoming increasingly drowsy or if she is having severe abdominal pain. Call your provider if you notice any concerning symptoms.

### **General Tips for Unwell Babies**

A sick baby may need to eat smaller meals, more often. Mucus can get into the stomach, causing discomfort and vomiting. Your baby's throat may also be sore, making eating painful. Try offering 2-3 ounces at a time, every two hours instead of every three.

Sleep does wonders to help a sick baby get better. Let your baby sleep as often and for as long as she can! If a baby is difficult to arouse or is excessively sleepy, then call your provider.

The information presented in this brochure has been reviewed and approved by Dr. Glenda Williams.

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