



University of North Carolina Wilmington
Abrons Student Health Center

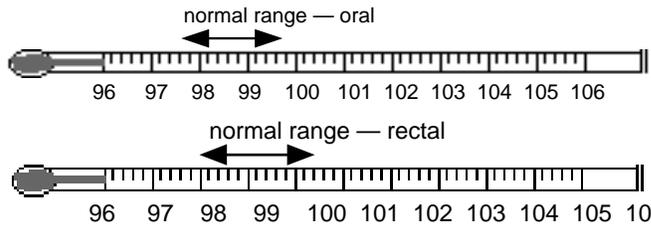
INSTRUCTION SHEET: FEVER (ADULT)

The Student Health Provider has diagnosed a fever. Fever is one response of the body to infection. Fever is not usually a harmful response. In fact, fever may help fight infection: Germs thrive at normal body temperature and decrease in activity as temperature rises.

Medical experts no longer recommend aggressively stamping out every shred of fever. When fever is uncomfortable or excessively high, though, safe methods of treatment (outlined below) are reasonable.

The presence of fever can be detected fairly well by the feel of a person's forehead. The only accurate way to check the height of a fever, however, is with a good thermometer, by mouth or rectum. Taking a temperature with paper strips applied to the forehead or with a thermometer in the armpit is not accurate.

The normal oral temperature is 98.6° F, plus or minus about one degree (temperature normally fluctuates small amounts during a 24-hour period). Rectal temperature runs a degree above oral temperature. Thus, an oral temperature up to 99.5° F, or rectal temperature up to 100.5° F, is not necessarily a fever.



If a person is uncomfortable with fever, treatment is reasonable. In fact, treating a fever with acetaminophen or ibuprofen can relieve other aches and pains caused by the infection. As a fever gets higher, certainly above 104° F, there is an increasing chance of a febrile convulsion (seizure); fever of 104° or above should be treated.

MEASURES YOU CAN TAKE TO TREAT FEVER:

1. Drink lots of liquids.
2. Take acetaminophen (Tylenol and others). A standard adult dose is 650 mg (two 325 mg tabs) every 4 hours or 1000 mg (two 500 mg tabs) every six hours.
3. Take ibuprofen. For a person weighing 80 pounds or more, the dose is 400 mg every 4 to 6 hours.
4. By alternating acetaminophen and ibuprofen, medication can be taken every three hours if necessary.
5. Dress *lightly*, so body heat can escape.
6. While it is useful to check a person's temperature, do not ignore other signs and symptoms. More important than a fever is a sick person's overall condition: Does the individual look sicker than just "feeling bad?" Has the person stopped taking even liquids? Is he/she confused or excessively drowsy? Is there a severe headache, new skin rash, or stiff neck? If the person's condition is worsening, go to the closest emergency department *at once*.