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Article on fever in children a parent's guide on prevention and treatment

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Abstract

A body temperature above the usual range is called Pyrexia, hyperthermia or fever. Fever may be caused by an infection, which is a very common health problem in children. This raise of body temperature is regulated or controlled by hypothalamus. It is the failure of the body's thermoregulation to maintain normal body temperature. In young children the central nervous system is not fully developed, so when the body temperature is raised it causes the risk of febrile seizure aged between 6 months to 5 years. Hence it is urgent, to treat high fever and to maintain normal body temperature through various interventions.

Keywords: Pyrexia, hyperthermia, fever, hypothalamus, febrile seizure

Introduction

Children may have low grade to moderate grade, sometimes the severe infection may cause high grade fever which is very common phenomenon. The body temperature often changes in infants and children. It depends on age, activity and time of the day which influence the body temperature. The normal body temperature is around 98.6°F. The raise of body temperature above 100.4°F is considered as fever in children. It is an indication of any infection or inflammation for which the brain responds by raising the body temperature to fight against the infection. The raise of body temperature is beneficial in two ways, the first one is to control the disease process and the second one is that there is "something is not ok" in the body, so it helps to identify the cause and take appropriate treatment for hyperthermia.

Incidence

One out of 100 children are affected with fever. According to Indian academy of pediatrics (IAP) fever is one of the most common reasons for children to seek medical attention, around 50 – 70% of pediatric visits, with highest incidence of fever episodes occur between 6 months and 4 years old.

Causes of fever in children

Most of the fever causes remain as unknown and the following are some of the causes of fever in children

- Infections may be caused by viral, bacteria, fungal and protozoa.
- Environmental factors like heat waves, hot rooms etc.
- Post vaccinations.
- Dehydration due to vomiting and diarrhoea.
- Autoimmune diseases like Lupus Erythematosus, Rheumatoid arthritis etc.
- Certain drugs like antipsychotics, vaccines etc.
- Overdressing or over heating especially the infants in radiant warmer.

Diagnosis

- History of fever in the family
- Physical examination
- Identify the underlying cause for fever through the blood investigations
- Urine test

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- Chest X-Ray
- Throat swab if needed

Clinical Manifestations

Look for the following physiological parameters that causes discomforts of the child

- Increased body temperature
- Increased heart and respiratory rate
- Decreased Spo₂ < 92%
- Capillary refill time < 3 Sec
- Shivering and Sweating
- Lethargy
- Head ache
- Nausea and Vomiting
- Cough, running nose and breathing difficulty
- Poor oral intake < 50%
- Skin rash
- Body pain
- Diarrhoea
- Decreased urine output or concentrated urine

Treatment

Nursing care Management

- Monitor Vital signs
- Assess the skin color and temperature
- Remove excessive blankets when the child is warm
- Monitor Blood count as per doctor's order
- Administer antipyretics, and antibiotics as per doctor's order
- Provide adequate hydration and nutrition
- Reduce physical activity
- Provide oral hygiene to prevent drying of mucus membranes
- Provide tepid bath to increase the heat loss through conduction.

Home care Management of fever

- Check the temperature every 4 hours.
- Provide plenty of oral fluids – Oral fluid will help to reduce heat from the body and helps to replace fluid from sweating and thereby prevents dehydration.
- Provide adequate rest because activity will increase heat
- Cover the child with light sheet and avoid sweater if there is no shivering.
- Provide high calorie soft diet and fruit juices to meet the metabolic needs
- Provide tepid or cold water sponging
- Provide warm water foot bath therapy
- Maintain personal hygiene for the child

Prevention of high fever

- Keep the child adequately hydrated especially in hot weather and during diarrhea
- During summer wear light cotton clothing
- Avoid exposure to hot sun
- Provide adequate nutrition with vitamin "C" to increase the immunity
- Avoid exposure to respiratory infections
- Provide tepid water bath when the temperature is raised
- During hot summer provide cool shower or bath

- Avoid leaving the child in a parked car
- Use air conditioned room and fan during summer
- Avoid heavy activities

Conflict of Interest

Not available

Financial Support

Not available

Conclusion

Fever in children less than five years is considered as a common problem. When there is a raise of body temperature 100.4⁰ F and above in children, may have the risk of developing febrile seizure. So it needs immediate attention to notify the symptoms and treat the cause of fever by initiating home remedies and seek medical attention in-order- to prevent its complications in children.

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