

It is the middle of the night, and the sound of a wailing young child pierces the air. Her body feels as if it's on fire when you touch her forehead. What do you do next? The reality of dealing with a feverish child can send some parents into a panic. This articles may help you with some of your anxiety when it comes to taking your child temperature and what it means.

## Taking a Temperature

It's often helpful to know your child's temperature. It is sometimes an indicator of the seriousness if the illness, although this isn't always true. A normal oral temperature is 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. A rectal temperature is one degree higher; an auxiliary [armpit] is one degree lower. "Normal" means average-some people run a slightly higher or lower temperature, and that is "normal" for them. Temperature varies throughout the day; a person's temperature is usually a little higher in the afternoon and evening.



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The most accurate way to take the temperature of a young child is rectally. Any thermometer will do, although one designed for rectal use is shaped a little differently so it will go in more easily. If your child can't keep a thermometer under her tongue and can't keep her mouth closed for three minutes, it's more accurate to use a rectal thermometer.

When you are taking your child's temperature with a rectal thermometer, it's easiest if you lay your child on her stomach. Shake down the thermometer to 96 degrees or lower and lubricate it with some petroleum jelly. After separating her buttocks with the thumb and first finger of one hand, gently insert the thermometer to a depth of about one inch. Then pinch closed her buttocks. Hold the thermometer in place for three minutes to be sure you get an accurate reading.

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Most people think of a "normal" body temperature as an oral temperature of 98.6 F. This is an average of normal body temperatures. Your temperature may actually be 1°F (0.6°C) or more above or below 98.6 F. Also, your normal body temperature changes by as much as 1°F (0.6°C) throughout the day, depending on how active you are and the time of day.

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Taking the oral temperature of a young child may be difficult. After shaking down the thermometer, put it under her tongue. She should close her mouth around the thermometer and keep her mouth shut for three minutes. Be sure she hasn't drunk anything cold within fifteen to thirty minutes before you take her temperature [if she has, the reading will be artificially low].

Auxiliary temperatures are not very accurate. The same applies to the strips that are held against a child's forehead.

The new electronic thermometers are accurate and much easier to use than the older, glass ones. They are quicker and easier to read, and they signal you when they have reached their final reading.