

Taking Your Child's Temperature

Types of Thermometers

Whatever thermometer you choose, be sure you know how to use it correctly to get an accurate reading. Keep and follow the manufacturer's recommendations for any thermometer.

Digital thermometers usually provide the quickest, most accurate readings. They come in many sizes and shapes and are available at most supermarkets and pharmacies in a range of prices.

Electronic ear thermometers measure the temperature inside the ear canal. Although they're quick and easy to use in older babies and kids, they aren't as accurate as digital thermometers for infants 3 months or younger and are more expensive.

Plastic strip thermometers (small plastic strips that you press against the forehead) may be able to tell you whether your child has a fever, but aren't reliable for taking an exact measurement, especially in infants and very young children. If you need to know your child's exact temperature, plastic strip thermometers are **not** the way to go.

Forehead thermometers also may be able to tell you if your child has a fever, but are not as accurate as oral or rectal digital thermometers.

Pacifier thermometers may seem convenient, but again, their readings are less reliable than rectal temperatures and shouldn't be used in infants younger than 3 months. They also require kids to keep the pacifier in their mouth for several minutes without moving, which is a nearly impossible task for most babies and toddlers.

Glass mercury thermometers were once common, but the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) now says they should not be used because of concerns about possible exposure to mercury, which is an environmental toxin.

Taking a Temperature

To take a temperature in the bottom (rectal): Before becoming parents, most people cringe at the thought of taking a rectal temperature. But don't worry — it's a simple process:

- Lubricate the tip of the thermometer with a lubricant, such as petroleum jelly.
- Place your child:
 - belly-down across your lap or on a firm, flat surface and keep your palm along the lower back
 - or face-up with legs bent toward the chest with your hand against the back of the thighs
- With your other hand, insert the lubricated thermometer into the anal opening about ½ inch to 1 inch. Stop if you feel any resistance.
- Steady the thermometer between your second and third fingers as you cup your hand against your baby's bottom. Soothe your child and speak quietly as you hold the thermometer in place.
- Wait until you hear the appropriate number of beeps or other signal that the temperature is ready to be read. Write down the number on the screen, noting the time of day that you took the reading.

To take a temperature in the mouth (oral): This process is easy in an older, cooperative child.

- Wait 20 to 30 minutes after your child finishes eating or drinking to take an oral temperature, and make sure there's no gum or candy in your child's mouth.
- Place the tip of the thermometer under the tongue and ask your child to close his or her lips around it. Remind your child not to bite down or talk, and to relax and breathe normally through the nose.

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- Wait until you hear the appropriate number of beeps or other signal that the temperature is ready to be read. Write down the number on the screen, noting the time of day that you took the reading.

To take a temperature under the arm (axillary): This is a convenient way to take a child's temperature.

Although not as accurate as a rectal or oral temperature in a cooperative child, some parents prefer to take an axillary temperature, especially for kids who can't hold a thermometer in their mouths.

- Remove your child's shirt and undershirt, and place the thermometer under an armpit (it must be touching skin only, not clothing).
- Fold your child's arm across the chest to hold the thermometer in place.
- Wait until you hear the appropriate number of beeps or other signal that the temperature is ready to be read. Write down the number on the screen, noting the time of day that you took the reading.

Whatever method you choose, keep these additional tips in mind:

- Never take a child's temperature right after a bath or if he or she has been bundled tightly for a while — this can affect the temperature reading.
- Never leave a child unattended while taking a temperature.

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