

What to do when an older person has a fever

By Dr. Warren Wong

1. Contact a health care provider as soon as possible. A fever of 102 degree F (38.80 C) is a life threatening emergency.
2. Check the other vital signs. A heart rate greater than 100, respiratory rate greater than 24, blood pressure less than 100 systolic (the upper number) are all worrisome. I will discuss the other vital signs soon.
 - If blood pressure is much lower than normal, hold off on blood pressure medications.
 - If the patient is Diabetic, check the blood sugar. If the blood sugar is lower than normal, hold off on medications for diabetes. The blood sugar can also become too high when a diabetic has an infection. Notify the doctor.
3. Use acetaminophen (Tylenol) for temperature greater than 101. Remove excess blankets and keep the room cool. But avoid overcooling. Do not use cooling baths or cold towels. Do not use rubbing alcohol.
4. Notice if the patient is coughing, has pain, urinary problems, or skin problems.
5. Encourage fluids but do not “force” a person to drink. To avoid choking do not feed a patient flat in bed. Encourage sports drinks or soup. Encourage frequent feedings.
6. Turn the patient side to side. A person who is sick is less likely to move. This increases the risk of injury to the skin and muscle. Keep sheets clean and dry.
7. Keep a close eye on the person. Older people with fever are weak. The risk of falling increases. Sometimes when patients fall, it turns out that they are sick and have a fever.
8. Check for worsening confusion. Confusion increases as a person becomes more ill.



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