

Taking a Temperature

Body heat is measured by taking a temperature with a thermometer. An increase in temperature, called a fever, may be a sign of infection.

The common scale used to measure body temperature in the United States is degrees Fahrenheit (F). Other countries use degrees Centigrade (C). Temperature is measured using a thermometer orally, by placing it in the mouth, or axillary, by placing it under the arm in the armpit. Take a baby's temperature under the arm unless directed otherwise by your doctor.

Buy a digital thermometer at your local grocery or drug store. Ask for help to find them in the store.



Taking a temperature using a digital thermometer

- **Oral or Mouth Temperature**

Do not put anything hot or cold in the mouth for 15 minutes before taking a temperature. This can affect the reading.

1. Take the thermometer out of its holder.
2. Clean the thermometer with soap and water or rubbing alcohol.
3. Turn the thermometer on and cover with a disposable cover if available. Check that the screen is clear of any earlier readings.
4. Place the tip of the thermometer under the tongue toward the back of the mouth.
5. Close the lips gently around the thermometer. Do not bite down. It may need to be held in place with a hand.
6. Keep the thermometer in place until it beeps.
7. Remove the thermometer.
8. Read the numbers in the window. These numbers are the temperature. **Normal body temperature is 98.6 degrees F by mouth.**
9. Write the temperature down if a record is to be kept.

10. Remove the plastic cover and throw it away in the trash.
11. Clean the thermometer with soap and water or rubbing alcohol.
12. Place the thermometer back in its holder.

Call your doctor:

- As you are directed.
- If your temperature is greater than 101.5 degrees F by mouth.

- **Axillary or Under the Arm Temperature**

Wait 15 minutes after exercising or bathing before checking an axillary temperature. This can affect the reading.

1. Take the thermometer out of its holder.
2. Clean the thermometer with soap and water or rubbing alcohol.
3. Turn the thermometer on and cover with a disposable cover if available. Check that the screen is clear of any earlier readings.
4. Pat the armpit dry with a tissue or cloth. Do not rub when drying because rubbing may warm the skin.
5. Put the covered tip under the arm and rest the arm down across the body.
6. Keep the thermometer in place until it beeps.
7. Remove the thermometer.
8. Read the numbers in the window. These numbers are the temperature. **Normal body temperature is 97.6 degrees F under the arm.**
9. Write the temperature down if a record is to be kept.
10. Remove the plastic cover and throw it away in the trash.
11. Clean the thermometer with soap and water or rubbing alcohol.
12. Place the thermometer back in its holder.

Call your doctor:

- As you are directed.
- **If babies less than 2 months old** have a temperature greater than 99.8 degrees F under the arm.
- **If babies older than 2 months, children and adults** have a temperature greater than 100.5 degrees F under the arm.