

Illness

What you can do when your child gets sick

Children experience some of their worst fears when they are sick.

Being sick doesn't feel good at all. If that's not bad enough, strange things happen with their bodies that they are not used to. They may throw up or have diarrhea. Even coughing, sneezing, and having a running nose can worry young children. To them, their body is out of control.

You understand that common illnesses and their symptoms are usually not threatening. But children, especially young ones, don't necessarily know that certain illnesses are common and that being sick will pass.

Your child needs your care and concern when he or she is sick. But, at the same time, you should not indulge a child so much that being sick becomes something that is attractive.

On Back

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You & Your Child



A publication of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development made possible with help from the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund For Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.

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What you can do when your child gets sick

Try to be calm, cheerful, upbeat

How you behave is important when your child becomes sick.

If you show signs of worry in your face or voice, your child will probably become worried. Everything will be more difficult when your child is scared or worried.

Be matter-of-fact – even cheerful – when you give medicine, take your child’s temperature, make meals, and care for him or her in other ways.

Explain how people get sick and that your child will feel better soon

It helps when children understand why certain things happen to them when they are sick, such as why they sneeze or throw up.

Explain why these things happen in simple language. Say, for example, that sneezing and vomiting help the body get rid of bad things.

Children also need to be reassured that they will get better soon and that they are not to blame for getting sick.

Children sometimes feel guilty about getting sick and may think that they somehow caused the sickness.

Help your child take medicine

Giving medicine to young children can be difficult. But there are some things you can do that may help.

- Never lie that medicine will not taste bad when it really does, or tell your child that a medical procedure won’t hurt when it really will.
- Don’t suggest that your child may not want to take the medicine. Don’t say, “Don’t you want your pills?” Simply say, “Here, take your pills.”
- If your child has trouble taking pills, try crushing the pills and mixing them in pleasant-tasting foods, such as applesauce or jelly.
- Never give medicines without consulting with a doctor.

Be patient when taking your child’s temperature

Taking temperature in the arm pit takes four minutes. Try to keep your child occupied while gently holding his or her arm against the side of the body.

By age 5 or 6 years, children can hold the thermometer under their tongues, which takes about two minutes. They should not talk or open their mouths.

Don’t encourage your child to eat if he or she isn’t hungry

Children may not have a very good appetite when they are sick. Don’t force them to eat. But check with a doctor to find out what your child must eat and, especially, what and how much they need to drink. Then, gently encourage your child to eat or drink what the doctor ordered.

Be careful not to spoil a sick child

Some children want their parents with them constantly when they are sick. They may become upset when a parent leaves the room. Be sympathetic and understanding at all times. But when you have to leave, leave.

Give your child interesting things to do while in bed. Some good activities include drawing, coloring, puzzles, looking at books and television. And when you leave your child’s side, be sure to say when you will return.

Check to see whether your child is faking an illness to get attention

After an illness, some children will say they are sick when they are not. They usually do this to get the kind of attention they received when they were sick.

Children who are sick usually become less active, quiet, and may even be listless. They may lose their appetite, have chills, a fever, or a runny nose.

If you think your child is faking, simply say, “Well, if you’re sick, let’s go to bed. Sick children need bed rest and their temperatures taken.” Most children who are faking it will suddenly feel much better.

