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50 Years Ago in *THE JOURNAL OF PEDIATRICS*

Best Practices to Control Fever in Children

Steele RW, Tanaka PT, Lara RP, Bass JW. Evaluation of sponging and of oral antipyretic therapy to reduce fever. *J Pediatr* 1970;77:824-9.

Fever is the body's physiologic response to underlying infection or inflammation, and hence it is pertinent to look for this underlying cause and treat the same. However, fever is associated with discomfort, and it is believed that antipyretics should be administered to relieve discomfort rather than to lower the body temperature.

Fifty years ago, Steele et al evaluated the role of sponging and oral antipyretic therapy to reduce fever in children. The study compared acetaminophen alone with acetaminophen and sponging with various solutions (tepid water, ice water, and equal parts of 70% isopropyl alcohol and tepid water). They concluded that sponging with ice water or alcohol in water was equally effective, and superior to sponging with tepid water, but associated with significantly more discomfort. They also demonstrated the effectiveness of combining sponging with acetaminophen.

In the last 50 years, nothing much has changed as far as parental anxiety and concern regarding high body temperature. Many parents administer antipyretics or resort to sponging even though there is minimal or no fever. As many as one-half of the parents administer incorrect doses of antipyretics, with approximately 15% giving suprathreshold doses of acetaminophen or ibuprofen.¹

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the use of either acetaminophen or ibuprofen in children with fever who seem to be distressed, and not solely for reducing body temperature.² External cooling methods such as tepid water or ice water sponging can lower the body temperature without improving comfort. The use of alcohol baths is not recommended because there have been reports of adverse events associated with systemic absorption of alcohol. According to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines, physical modalities like fanning and sponging are no longer recommended.³ Mefenamic acid is not recommended for use in children owing to its serious side effects. Physical methods may also cause shivering if the cooling is too much or too quick. The saga confirms the age-old saying that the simplest of problems do not have simple solutions!

Vikram Bhaskar, MD

Piyush Gupta, MD, FAMS

Department of Pediatrics
University College of Medical Sciences
Delhi, India

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