

Fever in the night

One night not so long ago, I woke up at 1 a.m. to find my daughter hot. I felt her head, her arms, and her legs to make sure I wasn't imagining it. Hot, hot, and hot. I felt my own head, arms, and legs just to compare. Then I grabbed the thermometer. She had a fever of 100.7 F.

I tend to get a little jumpy when my daughter is hurt or sick. I like to think that this is normal behavior for a first time mom. Sure, I get embarrassed when I rush my child to the doctor only to be told that what I fear is a flesh-eating rash is really just a bug bite or that her lack of poop is just minor dehydration, not a bowel obstruction. The nurses smile kindly and the doctors sigh as I leave the clinic. I imagine they're thinking, "She is the classic over-protective mom!" I might come away with my cheeks a little rosy, but better safe than sorry!

I take my role as mom very seriously. For a mom, seeking an expert's advice, such as a doctor's, should never be mocked. But I also try to remember that doctors have overloaded schedules and also need their sleep (all mothers can sympathize with that).

That night when the fever first started I reminded myself not to fret, as I am known to do. I sat down and thought through my options. I could (1) rush her to the E.R., (2) call the nurses at the hospital for their advice or (3) give Melise tylenol and go back to bed. I pondered very slowly in my half-awake state. I wanted to choose the most appropriate action that would protect my baby without overreacting.

I was fairly confident that option number one was overkill. Number two had me imagining those kindly nurses shaking their heads while instructing me to go straight to option three. But if I didn't call the nurses for advice would my desire to avoid embarrassment be overshadowing my job to protect my baby? Hmm, hard choices to make in the wee hours of night.

An idea came to me. I made my way clumsily through the dark house to reach a little book. It is the Healthwise Handbook given out periodically by our local clinic. It has instructions about when to go to the doctor for various symptoms. In the index I found "Fever, in children" and flipped to the page. I read carefully through the text about intensity of fever and accompanying

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symptoms. Did she have a rash? Diarrhea? Fever over 104? Nope, nope, nope. Whew, not an emergency. Then I found the spot that said for a fever between 100 and 102 to call a doctor if it persists for 48 hours.

That was good enough for me. I gave my baby tylenol and we both slept soundly the rest of the night. Her fever did hang on for almost two days. And then, as if it had read the handbook too, it disappeared right before I called the doctor.

Contemplating this situation in hindsight, I decided that the best advice that I had received from the Healthwise Handbook was not about tylenol or doctors, but this quote: "The way your child looks and acts is a better guide than the thermometer is." To me, that is a confirmation and reassurance that I, as the parent, will know when something is truly wrong. Until then, I promise to calmly assess each situation as it presents itself (fingers crossed!).