

F a c t s

HOW TO TAKE YOUR TEMPERATURE For People Over the Age of 5

Normal body temperature is regulated between 35.8C and 37.2C in healthy people. It may vary by 0.5 - 1 degree during the day. Body temperature shows a definite pattern: low in the morning, gradually increasing during the day, and reaching its maximum during the late afternoon or evening.

There are three ways in which an adult's temperature is usually taken:

1. by the mouth (oral)
2. in the ear (tympanic)
3. under the armpit (axillary). This method is less accurate, and is usually only used if the person is extremely drowsy or not clear mentally.

Types of Thermometers

- There are two types of glass thermometers: one for oral and axillary temperatures (it has a long slender bulb at one end, containing mercury) and one with a short, stubby, larger bulb for rectal temperatures. Rectal thermometers are usually used for children under 5 years. (See [How to Take a Child's Temperature](#)) As the mercury expands, in response to the heat from a person's body, it moves up the column.
- A digital thermometer can be used for oral, armpit, and rectal temperature taking. It is made of unbreakable plastic, is easy to read and measures temperature faster than glass.
- Ear thermometers are available but are expensive.
- A fever strip is not recommended because it does not give an accurate temperature reading.

Mouth Method (Oral)

If you are using a glass thermometer:

- Be sure it is an oral thermometer.
- Clean the thermometer with cool, soapy water and rinse (hot water causes the mercury to expand and may burst the thermometer).
- Hold the thermometer at the end away from the mercury and shake it with firm downward flicks of the wrist so that the mercury goes below 36°C.

— *Health & Environment Facts* —

- Make sure that you (or the person whose temperature is being taken) have not smoked a cigarette, had a hot or cold drink or taken a hot bath for half an hour, or the reading will not be accurate.
- Carefully place the silver tip of the thermometer under the tongue. Close mouth but do not bite down. This method is not recommended for children under 5 years of age.
- With mouth closed, leave the thermometer in place for 3 to 4 minutes.
- Remove the thermometer. Hold it near the light and slowly turn it until the line of mercury is seen. Read the temperature where the line of mercury ends.
- Clean the thermometer with cool soapy water and rinse. Use a cotton swab soaked in alcohol to rub down the thermometer.
- Store the thermometer in a container to prevent breakage.

If you are using a digital thermometer:

- Press the button to turn the thermometer on.
- Put the thermometer tip under tongue and close mouth.
- Wait for the thermometer to beep.
- Read the temperature on the display.
- Press the button to turn the thermometer off.
- To clean a digital thermometer, wash only the tip with soap and warm (not hot) water and wipe off with alcohol after use. Dry well.

Ear Method

- Use a clean probe tip each time, and follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully.
- Gently tug on the ear, pulling it up and back. This will help straighten the ear canal, and make a clear path inside the ear to the eardrum.
- Gently insert the thermometer until the ear canal is fully sealed off.
- Squeeze and hold down the button for one second.
- Remove the thermometer and read the temperature.

Armpit Method (Axillary)

If you are using a glass thermometer:

- Clean the thermometer and shake down the mercury as in Mouth Method.
- Place the silver tip of the thermometer in the centre of the armpit.
- Make sure the person's arm is held snugly against his/her body (forearm across chest).
- Leave the thermometer in place for at least 4 minutes.
- Remove, read, clean and store the thermometer as in Oral Method.
- Axillary temperatures are generally 0.6°C (1.0°F) lower than the oral readings.

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To use a digital thermometer:

- Press the button to turn the thermometer on.
- Put the thermometer in the centre of the person's armpit. The silver tip must touch the skin.
- Hold the top of the thermometer with one hand and hold down the person's arm with the other hand.
- Wait for the thermometer to beep.
- Read the temperature on display.
- Press the button to turn the thermometer off.
- To clean a digital thermometer, wash only the tip with soap and warm (not hot) water and wipe off with alcohol after use. Dry well.

Reference: Canadian Draft Pandemic Influenza Plan, 2002

**For more information,
please contact your physician or the Health Unit at 376-9420**