Taking Your Temperature - Adult

Your body heat is measured by taking your temperature with a thermometer. An increase in your temperature may be a sign of infection or other illnesses. The pattern of your temperature over time helps your doctor follow your condition and make decisions about your treatment. Your doctor may ask you to use a temperature log to track your temperature.

If you have cancer, you should **call your doctor if you have an oral (by mouth) temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celcius) or higher,** or as directed by your health care team. When you call to report your temperature, it is important to tell your doctor the way you checked your temperature. Always keep a thermometer nearby so you can check your temperature, especially when you do not feel well.

Based on your type of cancer, or cancer treatment, there may be times when you have an infection, but you may not have an increased temperature or fever.

When you have cancer, an infection can be life threatening if it is not treated right away. Call your doctor if you have a fever or any symptoms of infection.

How is temperature measured?

A normal, oral body temperature is 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit (37 degrees Celsius). Your temperature may vary by 1 degree Fahrenheit above or below during the day. It is normal for your temperature to be slightly lower in the morning and higher in the late afternoon or evening.

Your temperature can be measured in different places on your body, including:

- **Mouth**, called an oral temperature.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

© July 15, 2022. The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center – Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital and Richard J. Solove Research Institute.

- **Armpit**, called an axillary temperature. This method may measure 0.5 to 1 degree Fahrenheit **lower** than an oral temperature.
- **Ear**. This method uses a special type of thermometer and may measure 0.5 to 1 degree Fahrenheit **higher** than an oral temperature.
- **Forehead** (temporal). This method uses a special scanner and may measure 0.5 to 1 degree Fahrenheit lower than an oral temperature.
- **Rectum**, called a rectal temperature. This method is most often used with infants, and is normally not used with adults.

Ask your health care team about the best way to check your temperature. It is important to use the same way each time you check your temperature. If you need to use a different way to check your temperature, it best to make a note of that on your temperature log.

Types of Thermometers

There are many types of thermometers. The most accurate thermometers are **digital**. Digital thermometers are fast and easy to use. The temperature reading shows up in a small window on the thermometer. Always make sure these thermometers have a fully charged battery before use. It is important to read and follow the package instructions before you use the thermometer.

Do not use glass thermometers. Glass thermometers are much harder to read and can break easily and cause injury. The mercury inside the thermometer can be harmful to you and the environment.

How to Use a Digital Thermometer - Oral Temperature

Do not put anything hot or cold in your mouth for at least 20 minutes before you take your temperature with an oral thermometer. The temperature in your mouth can affect the accuracy of the reading.

1. Wash your hands with soap and warm water. Take the clean thermometer out of its holder.
2. Based on the type of thermometer you use, if possible put the thermometer tip into a plastic cover that can be thrown away when you are done.
3. Press the button to turn the thermometer on.
4. Place the tip of the thermometer under your tongue at the back of your mouth.

5. Close your lips gently around the thermometer. **Do not** bite the thermometer. You may need to use your hand to help hold it the thermometer in place.
6. Keep the thermometer under your tongue until it beeps.
7. Remove the thermometer from your mouth and read the numbers in the window. These numbers are your temperature.
8. If you use a temperature log, write down your temperature.
9. If used, remove the plastic cover and throw it away.
10. **It is important to keep your thermometer clean.** Follow the cleaning instructions that came with your thermometer. Place the thermometer back in its holder.

How to Use a Digital Thermometer - Axillary Temperature

Wait at least 20 minutes after you exercise or bathe before you check your axillary temperature from your armpit. It may affect the accuracy of your reading.

1. Wash your hands with soap and warm water. Take the clean thermometer out of its holder.
2. Based on the type of thermometer you use, if possible put the thermometer tip into a plastic cover that can be thrown away when you are done.
3. Press the button to turn the thermometer on.
4. Gently pat your armpit dry with a clean tissue or cloth. **Do not** rub you skin when you dry your armpit. Rubbing may warm your sin and affect the accuracy of your reading.
5. Put the covered tip under your arm and rest your arm down against your body.
6. Keep the thermometer in place until it beeps.
7. Remove the thermometer from under your arm and read the numbers in the window. These numbers are your temperature.
8. If you use a temperature log, write down your temperature.
9. If used, remove the plastic cover and throw it away.
10. **It is important to keep your thermometer clean.** Follow the cleaning instructions that came with your thermometer. Place the thermometer back in its holder.

How to Use a Digital Thermometer - Ear Temperature

Wait at least 20 minutes after you come inside from the heat or cold before you check your temperature with an ear thermometer. It may affect the accuracy of your reading.

1. Wash your hands with soap and warm water. Take the clean thermometer out of its holder.
2. Based on the type of thermometer you use, if possible put the thermometer tip into a plastic cover that can be thrown away when you are done.
3. Press the button to turn the thermometer on. Hold your head still.
4. Gently pull your ear up and then back.
5. Gently put the covered tip in your ear opening. **Do not** push hard or use force. Hold it in place.
6. Keep the thermometer in place until it beeps.
7. Remove the thermometer from your ear and read the numbers in the window. These numbers are your temperature.
8. If you use a temperature log, write down your temperature.
9. If used, remove the plastic cover and throw it away.
10. **It is important to keep your thermometer clean.** Follow the cleaning instructions that came with your thermometer. Place the thermometer back in its holder.

How to Use a Digital Thermometer - Temporal Temperature

Wait at least 20 minutes after you come inside from the heat or cold before you check your temperature with an ear thermometer. It may affect the accuracy of your reading.

1. Wash your hands with soap and warm water. Take the clean thermometer out of its holder.
2. Press the button to turn the thermometer on.
3. Place the thermometer on the skin of your forehead. Follow the instructions provided with your thermometer.
4. Listen for a sound like a beep.
5. Remove the thermometer from your forehead and read the numbers in the window. These numbers are your temperature.

6. If you use a temperature log, write down your temperature.
7. **It is important to keep your thermometer clean.** Follow the cleaning instructions that came with your thermometer. Place the thermometer back in its holder.

Talk with your doctor about other ways to check your temperature, such as fever strips or disposable thermometers. It is important that the method you use gives you and your doctor the correct temperature reading and is the best method for your care.