

Febrile Convulsions

Febrile convulsions (a fit or seizure caused by a fever) are caused by a sudden change in your child's body temperature, usually associated with a fever (temperature above $38\frac{3}{4}^{\circ}\text{C}$). A high temperature is a sign of infection somewhere in the body and is often caused by a virus or bacteria. A high fever does not necessarily mean your child has a serious illness. Fever itself is not harmful until it reaches $42.0\frac{3}{4}^{\circ}\text{C}$.

Most children with fever suffer only minor discomfort, however 1 in 30 will have a febrile convulsion at one time or another. This usually happens between the ages of 6 months and 6 years. Febrile convulsions are not harmful to your child and do not cause brain damage. They are, however, quite upsetting to parents to witness.

Most children with febrile convulsions only ever have one fit. Some children will have one or more seizures, usually during illnesses which cause a fever. There is no increased risk of epilepsy in children who have febrile convulsions.

Signs and symptoms

During a febrile convulsion:

- Your child usually loses consciousness.
- Their muscles may stiffen or jerk.
- Your child may go red or blue in the face.
- The convulsion may last for several minutes.
- Then the movements stop, and the child regains consciousness but remains sleepy or irritated afterwards.

Treatment during a convulsion

There is nothing you can do to make the convulsion stop.

- The most important thing is to stay calm – don't panic.
- Place your child on a soft surface, lying on his or her side or back.
- Do not restrain your child.
- ***Do not put anything in their mouth, including your fingers.*** Your child will not choke or swallow their tongue.
- Try to watch exactly what happens, so that you can describe it later.
- Time how long the convulsion lasts.
- Do not put a child who is having a convulsion in the bath.

Call an ambulance on 000 if:

- The convulsion lasts more than 5 minutes.
- Your child does not wake up when the convulsion stops.
- If your child looks very sick when the convulsion stops.

If the convulsion stops in less than 5 minutes:

- You should see your family doctor as soon as possible.
- And your child was very unwell before the convulsion then you should take them to see a doctor immediately.

It may be OK to take the child in your own car – **only do this if there are 2 adults** (one to drive and one to look after the child). Drive very carefully. A few minutes longer will not make any important difference.

Fever care

Since a fever is the body's natural response to infection, it is not always necessary to reduce a fever. **Treatment of a fever with paracetamol or ibuprofen does not prevent a febrile convulsion.** However, if your child is very uncomfortable, you can follow the simple steps found on the [Fever in children](#) fact sheet.

Care after the convulsion

- Occasionally children who have long convulsions need to be watched in hospital for a while afterwards. This is usually to work out the cause of the fever and watch the course of your child's illness.
- Your child may be a little cranky for a day or so, but this will pass.
- Resume your usual routines.
- Put your child to sleep at the usual time, in his or her own bed. Don't worry about whether you will hear a convulsion; a bed or cot is a safe place for a convulsion.

Follow up

- Most children who have febrile convulsions do not have any long term health problems. They are normally healthy and grow out of them by the age of 6.
- If your child has repeated long convulsions it may be of benefit to visit a general paediatrician – children's doctor. Discuss this with your local doctor or emergency department.

Key points to remember

- 1 in 3 children have a febrile convulsion at one time or another, usually between the ages of 6 months and 6 years.
- Nothing can be done to prevent the convulsion from occurring, remain calm and try not to panic.
- Putting a child in a bath (to lower their temperature) during a convulsion is dangerous.
- Febrile convulsions will not cause brain damage. Even very long convulsions lasting an hour or more almost never cause harm.
- **If the convulsion lasts more than 5 minutes call an ambulance,** otherwise make an appointment with your family doctor.
- If you are worried for any other reason, please see your family doctor.

Other sources of information

- Your family doctor
- Your local hospital emergency department
- Royal Children's Hospital Emergency Department
- Factsheet: [Fever](#)
- Factsheet: [Seizures – safety issues and how to help](#)

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More RCH Fact Sheets can be found at www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/.

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