

What is a febrile convulsion?

A febrile convulsion is a convulsion or fit that occurs when a child has a fever (a temperature above 38°C). Febrile convulsions occur in approximately 1 in 30 children aged between 6 months and six years. The convulsion is almost always very brief (less than 2 minutes) and does not cause your child any harm. It is important to seek medical help if your child has a febrile convulsion so that the cause of the fever can be found, and appropriate medical advice and treatment can be given.

Why do febrile convulsions occur?

It is possible for anyone to have a convulsion, given the right stimulation. The brains of some infants and young children are very sensitive to rises in body temperature making them prone to having a convulsion when they have a fever. The convulsion usually occurs as the temperature increases rapidly and most often occurs on the first day of the illness. It may be the first sign that your child is unwell. Some families are more susceptible to febrile convulsions than others.

What do febrile convulsions look like?

When a child has a convulsion or fit they become unconscious, unaware of their surroundings, their eyes may roll back and any part of their body may jerk or twitch. They may have difficulty breathing or look blue. It is frightening to witness your child

having a convulsion but remember that it is very rare for a convulsion to cause harm. Once the convulsion stops your child is likely to be sleepy or irritated for some time afterwards.

Treatment during a convulsion

- > Stay calm and note what time the convulsion started. Remember that, although convulsions are very frightening to witness, they are very unlikely to cause harm to your child
- > Place your child on a soft, flat surface, lying on his/her side
- > Don't try to restrain your child
- > Don't put anything in your child's mouth- they won't swallow their tongue or choke
- > Do not place a fitting child in a bath
- > Try to notice what your child is doing - this information is very helpful to your doctor

Call an ambulance 000 if:

- The convulsion lasts more than 5 minutes
- Your child does not wake up once the convulsion stops
- Your child looks very sick once the convulsion stops

What should I do when the convulsion stops?

Your child may not wake up straight away so it is important to keep him/her lying on their side until fully conscious.

Take your child to a doctor (either at the hospital or local clinic) to look for the cause of the fever.

Sometimes a child may be watched overnight in hospital to allow the doctors to check the course of their illness.

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 information handout about Fever.

You do not need to put your child in a cool bath, sponge them down or put a fan on them to "break the fever". Never put a fitting child in a bath.

Febrile Convulsions

Follow Up

Most children who have brief febrile convulsions are healthy, with no long-term problems and stop having them by the time they are 6 years old.

For those children who have very long convulsions or have them frequently, review by a paediatrician (a specialist children's doctor) is recommended.

Will my child get epilepsy?

Febrile convulsions do not significantly increase the risk of developing epilepsy later in life.

Remember - febrile convulsions:

- > Are common
- > May happen more than once in some children
- > Cause no long-term problems
- > Do not result in brain damage, death or epilepsy
- > Stop by six years of age

For more information

**Women's and Children's Hospital
Paediatric Emergency Department
72 King William Road
North Adelaide SA 5006
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Fax: (08) 8161 7459
www.wch.sa.gov.au**

The Women's & Children's Hospital is a smoke-free site.

Non-English speaking: for information in languages other than English, call the interpreting and Translating Centre and ask them to call The Department of Health. This service is available at no cost to you, contact (08) 8226 1990.

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