

What are Febrile Convulsions

Information and advice for parents and carers

Paediatrics

What are febrile convulsions?

A febrile convulsion (also called fever fit or febrile seizure) is an attack triggered when children have a high temperature, usually due to an infection.

Convulsions can be very distressing to see, so parents often feel frightened and helpless. But they usually stop after a few minutes.

What happens?

Your child may become stiff all over and lose consciousness. The whole body or parts of the body may jerk rhythmically. Eyes may roll up. There may be frothing at the mouth and a blueness around the lips. Breathing may seem shallow. Some children wet themselves. After a few minutes your child recovers but may be upset, confused, or sleepy.

Who has them?

Many young children between the ages of 6 months and 5 years will have a febrile convulsion. They are less likely after this age, but still occur.

Will my child have more than one?

Most young children will only have one febrile convulsion. About one third may have further febrile convulsions when ill with a high temperature.

Does this mean my child has epilepsy?

No, most children who have a febrile convulsion do not have any further problems of this type after reaching school age. A few children may go onto have epilepsy.

What should I do if my child has a fever?

- If you can, measure their temperature
- Keep your child cool. Do not over clothe your child or overheat the room.
- Give plenty of fluids to drink
- Give children's paracetamol according to the manufacturer's instructions, this will help to reduce the fever.
- If your child seems ill or has earache or a sore throat, ask your doctor to see him or her in case any other treatment is needed. For most children with a fever due to virus infection antibiotics are not necessary.

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What should I do if my child has a febrile convulsion?

1. Keep calm. Lay your child down on the floor or bed with their head at the same level or slightly lower than their body. Loosen any tight clothing, especially round the neck. Do not slap or shake them.
2. As soon as you can, turn your child on their side to ease breathing – this is known as the “Recovery Position”. Do not put anything in your child’s mouth, and keep the airway open by easing their head into a sniffing position.
3. Note the time. Remove clothing to keep your child cool. Wait for the convulsion to stop.
4. If the convulsion stops by 5 minutes, allow your child to recover and tell your doctor what has happened.
5. If the convulsion shows no sign of stopping after 5 minutes, or if your child has a series of convulsions in quick succession, call an ambulance so that your child can be taken to A&E for treatment to stop the convulsions.

Afterwards your child may be confused, upset and sleepy and will need reassurance.

Further Information

National Health Service (2019) *Febrile seizures*. Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/febrile-seizures/> (Accessed 25 February 2021).

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