

# Febrile Convulsions

## Patient Information

Child Health Department

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## What is a febrile convulsion?

Febrile convulsions are fits (seizures) that sometimes happen in a child with a high temperature. They can happen as a result of any illness that causes a high temperature.

During a febrile convulsion the child becomes unconscious and usually stiff with jerking of the arms and legs. It is caused by a storm of electrical activity within the brain. They are not as serious as they look.

Watching your child have a febrile convulsion can be a very frightening experience because they look like epileptic fits however, febrile convulsions rarely lead to epilepsy.

Febrile convulsions usually happen between the ages of six months and six years. They are most common between the ages of six months and three years.

Children who have had a febrile convulsion may have another during the same illness or another illness.

## What causes a febrile convulsion?

Common illnesses and infections including:

- Cough and colds.
- Tonsillitis.
- Ear infection (Otitis Media)
- Pneumonia.
- Kidney or Urinary Tract Infections.

## What are the symptoms of a febrile convulsion?

Most febrile convulsions last between 1 to 5 minutes. They usually happen on the first day of an illness, not necessarily when the child's temperature is the highest. Sometimes it is the first sign that the child is ill.

- The child looks hot and flushed.
- They become dazed or confused and black out (lose consciousness). They may fall down if they have been standing or sitting.
- Their eyes may roll backwards.
- The child's muscles in the arms, legs, face and other parts of the body tighten and begin to twist and shake.
- They might moan or cry out.
- They may stop breathing (usually for around 30 seconds) and their skin may turn a little blue.

- Many children lose control of their bladder or bowel.
- They often fall into a deep sleep afterwards.
- It may take them up to an hour to recover.

### **What should I do if my child has a high temperature?**

- Keep the child cool.
- Do not over heat the room.
- Dress the child in light clothing or cover with a cotton sheet.
- Give plenty of fluids to drink. Breastfed children should continue to be breastfed.
- Give paracetamol or ibuprofen if your child is distressed or uncomfortable, however it will not prevent a febrile convulsion from occurring.

### **Things you should not do:**

- Wrap your child in a blanket.
- Tepid sponging, fanning and cold baths.
- Put extra clothes on your child.
- Give them a hot water bottle.
- Take your child into bed with you.

If your child seems ill or has earache or a sore throat, let your GP see them in case they need any other treatment such as an antibiotic (for most children fever is due to a viral infection and antibiotics are not necessary).

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

There is nothing you can do to stop a convulsion from happening. Most febrile convulsions will stop by themselves after a few minutes, so note the time when the convulsion started.

### **You can help your child by:**

- Making sure the area around them is clear of anything that could harm them eg toys.
- Laying the child on their side with their head slightly tilted back to keep the airways clear. This is called the recovery position.
- Usually your child will start breathing again after 30 seconds. If you are concerned that they are not breathing, after this time, call 999 immediately.
- Not putting anything in their mouth or shake the child.
- Loosen any tight clothing around their neck.
- Wait for the convulsion to stop, if less than five minutes contact your GP. If it continues for longer than five minutes call 999.

## **Will it happen again?**

Children usually have only one febrile convulsion; however, about three in 10 children will have a further convulsion with a future feverish illness. It is more likely if their first convulsion occurs before they are 15 months old or if there is a family history of febrile convulsions in close relatives (mum, dad, sister, brother).

Once your child is over the age of three, the chances become less likely.

## **Will a febrile convulsion cause any permanent damage?**

A simple febrile convulsion is not known to cause any serious damage to your child and the risks of long term complications are extremely low. In the UK there have been no known deaths caused by febrile convulsions.

## **Should a child who has had a febrile convulsion have immunisations?**

Yes. Some children develop a fever after immunisation and a very small number of children develop febrile convulsions following immunisation however, this is highly unlikely to cause any harm or to happen again after future immunisations.

Please use this space to write notes or reminders.

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## Comments, Compliments or Complaints

The Patient Relations/Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) Department provides confidential on the spot advice, information and support to patients, relatives, friends and carers.

## Contact Us

Tel: 01942 822376 (Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm)

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## Ask 3 Questions

Become more involved in decisions about your healthcare. You may be asked to make choices about your treatment. To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions:

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?



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## How We Use Your Information

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This leaflet is also available in audio, large print, Braille and other languages upon request. For more information please ask in the department/ward.

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