

Febrile convulsions

A febrile convulsion is a fit or seizure caused by a sudden change in your child's body temperature, and is usually associated with a fever (see our fact sheet [Fever in children \(www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Fever_in_children\)](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Fever_in_children)).

Febrile convulsions may be alarming and upsetting to witness, but they are not harmful to your child. Even very long convulsions lasting an hour or more almost never cause harm. Febrile convulsions do not cause brain damage, and there is no increased risk of epilepsy in children who have had simple febrile convulsions.

Most children with fever suffer only minor discomfort; however, one child in 30 will have a febrile convulsion as a result of fever. Febrile convulsions most commonly happen between the ages of six months and six years. Usually, children who have a febrile convulsion will only ever have just one.

Treating a child's fever with paracetamol or ibuprofen will not prevent a febrile convulsion.

Signs and symptoms of febrile convulsions

During a febrile convulsion:

- your child will usually lose consciousness
- their muscles may stiffen or jerk
- your child may go red or blue in the face.

The convulsion may last for several minutes. When the movements stop, your child will regain consciousness, but they will probably remain sleepy or irritated afterwards.

Usually, a febrile convulsion happens if your child's temperature goes up suddenly. Sometimes, a convulsion occurs before parents actually realise their child has a fever.

What to do 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 their side or back.
- Try to watch exactly what happens, so that you can describe it to the doctor later. It can be useful if you are able to record video footage of the convulsion to show the doctor.
- Time how long the convulsion lasts, if possible.
- Do not restrain your child.
- Do not put anything in their mouth, including your fingers. Your child will not choke or swallow their tongue.
- Do not put a child who is having a convulsion in the bath to lower their temperature.

When to see a doctor

If your child's febrile convulsion lasts less than five minutes, make an appointment to see your GP as soon as possible to find out the cause of the fever that caused the convulsion.

If the convulsion was less than five minutes long and your child was very unwell before the convulsion, take them to see your GP or visit to your nearest hospital emergency department immediately. It may be OK to take the child in your own car, but only do this if there are two adults – one to drive and one to look after the child. Drive very carefully. A few minutes longer will not make any important difference.

Call an ambulance immediately if:

- the convulsion lasts more than five minutes
- your child does not wake up when the convulsion stops

- your child looks very sick when the convulsion stops.

Occasionally, children who have had a long convulsion 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.

Care at home

In most cases, you can look after your child at home after a doctor has seen them for a febrile convulsion.

- 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.

While most children will only ever have one febrile convulsion, some children will have more than one seizure, usually during illnesses that cause a fever. Most children who have febrile convulsions do not have any long-term health problems. They will normally grow out of them by the age of six.

If your child has repeated long convulsions, it may be helpful to visit a general paediatrician (specialist children's doctor). Discuss this with your GP or hospital emergency department.

Fever care

A fever is the body's natural response to infection, and it is not always necessary to reduce a fever. Treating your child's fever with paracetamol or ibuprofen will not prevent a febrile convulsion. However, if the fever is making your child miserable, you can help them to feel more comfortable by following the advice in our fact sheet [Fever in children](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Fever_in_children) (www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Fever_in_children).

Key points to remember

- One in 30 children have a febrile convulsion at one time or another, usually between the ages of six months and six years.
- Nothing can be done to prevent a febrile convulsion from occurring.
- During a convulsion, remain calm and try not to panic. Do not put your child in a bath, restrain them, or put anything in their mouth.
- Febrile convulsions are not harmful to your child, and will not cause brain damage.
- **If the convulsion lasts more than five minutes call an ambulance.**
- **If the convulsion lasts less than five minutes and your child was very unwell before the convulsion, take them to the GP or hospital emergency department as soon as possible.** Otherwise, make an appointment to see your GP.

For more information

- Kids Health Info factsheet: [Fever in children](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Fever_in_children) (www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Fever_in_children)
- Kids Health Info factsheet: [Seizures - safety issues and how to help](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Seizures_safety_issues_and_how_to_help) (www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Seizures_safety_issues_and_how_to_help)
- See your GP or local hospital emergency department.

Common questions our doctors are asked

If my child has a febrile convulsion, does that mean they have epilepsy?

No. Febrile convulsions are fits or seizures that occur only with a fever. Children with epilepsy have repeated seizures without fever. Even if your child has many febrile convulsions, it still does not mean they have epilepsy. Children who have infrequent febrile convulsions do not have an increased risk of epilepsy.

Do febrile convulsions cause brain damage?

No. No matter how dramatic and frightening febrile convulsions may look, they do not cause brain damage. Even very long convulsions lasting an hour or more almost never cause any harm.

If my child has one febrile convulsion, will it happen again?

About one in three children will have more febrile convulsions with future febrile illnesses. Your child will outgrow the tendency to have febrile convulsions by the time they are about 6 years old. If your child has experienced a febrile convulsion, it is important for you to learn what to do if your child does have another.

Can I prevent my child from getting a febrile convulsion by giving them paracetamol or ibuprofen?

No. Even though these medicines may help to reduce a fever, if your child is going to have a febrile convulsion, then it will happen. There is nothing you can do to prevent it.

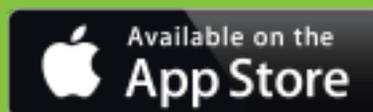
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