

Febrile convulsions in children

What is a febrile convulsion?

A febrile (fever) convulsion is a fit or seizure that occurs in children with a fever. The fever may not be obvious before the fit, as it usually comes on very quickly. This rapid change in temperature causes the seizure, not how high the temperature is.

Most fits last less than two minutes, but can range from a few seconds to up to 15 minutes. Your child may be drowsy after a fit.

Seizures usually happen in children aged from six months to six years of age. Febrile convulsions are very common, about one in 20 children will have one.

What causes a febrile convulsion?

Febrile convulsions happen when there is a sudden change in body temperature. The cause of the fever is usually a viral illness. Trying to treat the fever (such as by giving *paracetamol*) will not prevent a febrile convulsion.

Febrile convulsions tend to run in families, although the reason for this is not known.

What is fever?

Fever is the body's normal response to an infection and is usually harmless. For a child, this occurs when the body temperature reaches above 38°C.

If your child has a fever:

- keep them cool by not overdressing them or having their room too hot
- fanning or tepid sponging/bathing is **not recommended** for children with a fever as it may cause shivering and distress
- give them plenty to drink (it is best to give small frequent drinks, or sips, of water)
- give paracetamol (such as *Panadol* or *Dymadon*) or ibuprofen (such as *Nurofen*) if your child has pain or is miserable
- carefully check the label for the correct dose and make sure you are not giving your child any other products containing paracetamol or ibuprofen (such as some cough medicines and cold and flu preparations).

Paracetamol or ibuprofen do not prevent febrile convulsions.

What are the symptoms?

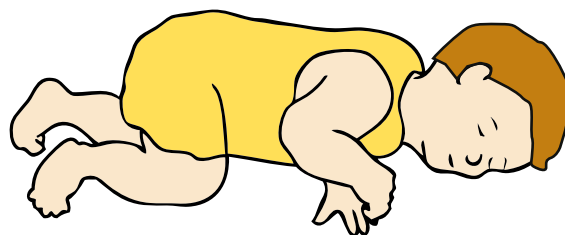
A febrile convulsion can be very frightening for parents and observers to witness. The signs and symptoms usually include:

- loss of consciousness (a 'blackout')
- twitching or jerking of arms and legs
- difficulty breathing and/or foaming at the mouth
- going pale or blue in colour
- the eyes rolling back so only the whites are visible.

Your child may take up to 30 minutes to wake up properly afterwards. They may be irritable during this time and appear not to recognise you.

What should I do if my child has a fit?

- Stay calm and do not panic.
- **Do not** force or put anything into the child's mouth, including your fingers.
- Ensure your child is safe by placing them on the floor and removing any objects that they could hit against.
- Note the time the fit started and stopped, to tell the doctor.
- Once the fit has stopped place your child on their side and make them comfortable.



- **Do not** shake or slap your child to wake them up.
- **Do not** restrain your child.
- Have your child checked by your local doctor or health care professional as soon as possible.

If the fit lasts longer than five minutes or if you are very worried call an ambulance (dial 000).



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What to expect

- Children suffer no pain or discomfort during a fit.
- A febrile convulsion is not epilepsy. No regular medication is needed.
- A short fit will not cause brain damage. Even a long fit almost never causes harm.
- Children who have febrile convulsions normally grow up healthy and do not have any permanent damage from seizures.
- One in three babies and children who have had one febrile convulsion will have another. Some children will never have a seizure or have only one in their lifetime. There is no way of predicting who will be affected or when this will happen.
- Children usually have fewer seizures as they get older, and most seizures stop completely by the age of six.

Notes:

Seeking help



In a **medical emergency** go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance (dial 000).



For other medical problems see your local doctor or health-care professional.



For health advice from a Registered Nurse you can call **NURSE-ON-CALL 24 hours a day** on **1300 60 60 24** for the cost of a local call from anywhere in Victoria.*

NURSE-ON-CALL provides access to **interpreting services** for callers not confident with English. Call **1300 60 60 24**.

*Calls from mobile calls may be charged at a higher rate



Want to know more?

- Ask your local doctor or health care professional
- Visit the **Royal Children's Hospital** website www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo
- Visit the **Better Health Channel** www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

If you would like to receive this publication in an **accessible format**, please phone 9096 8064 or email edfactsheets@dhs.vic.gov.au

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