

# FEBRILE SEIZURES



## What is a seizure?

The brain controls how the body moves by sending out small electrical signals through nerves to the muscles. A seizure is an abnormal burst of electrical activity within the brain that changes the way the body functions. Seizures can cause someone to become unresponsive, have unusual movements, or behave strangely.

## What is a febrile seizure?

A febrile seizure is a convulsion that occurs during a fever higher than 100.4°F (38°C). Febrile seizures occur in children between the ages of 3 months and 6 years. They are most common around 18 months of age and typically occur with temperatures higher than 102.2°F. They usually last only a few minutes, and often occur in the first few days of illness when a child's temperature rises rapidly.

No one is certain why febrile seizures occur. Febrile seizures affect between two and four percent of children under the age of 5.

They are more common in children with a family history of febrile seizures. While they can be frightening, febrile seizures usually end without treatment and don't cause any other health problems. Having a febrile seizure doesn't mean that a child will have epilepsy or brain damage.

## Does my child have epilepsy?

Febrile seizures are not the same as epilepsy; although in rare cases they may be the first seizures experienced by a child who goes on to develop epilepsy. Epilepsy is diagnosed in a child who has two or more seizures without a specific cause, such as fever. In children with epilepsy, illness or fever may trigger seizures but seizures occur even without fever. Only about 3% of children who have febrile seizures are later discovered to have epilepsy.

## Symptoms of a febrile seizure

During a febrile seizure, a child usually becomes unresponsive, and has stiffening and/or rhythmic jerking movements of the arms, legs, or face. Most febrile seizures last less than 1-2 minutes. After a seizure, a child is usually confused or sleepy. Although it is not

as common, some febrile seizures last more than 15 minutes. After a longer seizure, a child can have a temporary weakness in his or her arm or leg.

## Will this happen again?

It is possible that your child will continue to have febrile seizures. 30-40% of children who have febrile seizures will have another seizure with fever. Children grow out of the tendency to have seizures with fever as they age, with most outgrowing febrile seizures by 5 years of age.

## What should I do when my child has a seizure?

- Place your child on his or her side.
- Do NOT put anything in your child's mouth or try to stop the jerking movements.
- Keep track of how long the seizure lasts. If it last longer than 5 minutes, call 911.
- After a febrile seizure it is important that your child be seen by a medical provider (in an emergency department or primary care provider's office) to determine what is causing the fever.

## How is a febrile seizure treated?

If a febrile seizure stops on its own, treatment is only needed for fever and the cause of the fever, not the seizure itself. If a febrile seizure last more than 5 minutes, 911 should be called. A medical team may use an anti-seizure medication to stop the seizure.

If your child's febrile seizures last for more than 5 minutes or happen frequently your medical provider may recommend further treatment.

## References and Resources:

<http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org/livingwithepilepsy/parentsandcaregivers/parents/infants/febrileconvulsions.cfm>  
<http://kidshealth.org/parent/general/sick/febrile.html>  
<http://www.uptodate.com/contents/febrile-seizures>

