



Weill Cornell Medical College

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Patient Education:

Febrile Seizure

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Febrile Seizure

Febrile seizures are seizures caused by high fever in children. They can happen to any child between the ages of 6 months and 5 years, but they are most common in children between 1 and 2 years of age. Febrile seizures usually start during the first few hours of a fever and last for just a few minutes. Rarely, a febrile seizure can last up to 15 minutes.

Watching your child have a febrile seizure can be frightening, but febrile seizures are rarely dangerous. Febrile seizures do not cause brain damage, and they do not mean that your child will have epilepsy. These seizures do not need to be treated. However, if your child has a febrile seizure, you should always call your child's health care provider in case the cause of the fever requires treatment.

CAUSES

A viral infection is the most common cause of fevers that cause seizures. Children's brains may be more sensitive to high fever. Substances released in the blood that trigger fevers may also trigger seizures. A fever above 102°F (38.9°C) may be high enough to cause a seizure in a child.

RISK FACTORS

Certain things may increase your child's risk of a febrile seizure:

- Having a family history of febrile seizures.
- Having a febrile seizure before age 1. This means there is a higher risk of another febrile seizure.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

During a febrile seizure, your child may:

- Become unresponsive.
- Become stiff.
- Roll the eyes upward.
- Twitch or shake the arms and legs.
- Have irregular breathing.
- Have slight darkening of the skin.
- Vomit.

After the seizure, your child may be drowsy and confused.

DIAGNOSIS

Your child's health care provider will diagnose a febrile seizure based on the signs and symptoms that you describe. A physical exam will be done to check for common infections that cause fever. There are no tests to diagnose a febrile seizure. Your child may need to have a sample of spinal fluid taken (*spinal tap*) if your child's health care provider suspects that the source of the fever could be an infection of the lining of the brain (*meningitis*).

TREATMENT

Treatment for a febrile seizure may include over-the-counter medicine to lower fever. Other treatments may be needed to treat the cause of the fever, such as antibiotic medicine to treat bacterial infections.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Give medicines only as directed by your child's health care provider.
- If your child was prescribed an antibiotic medicine, have your child finish it all even if he or she starts to feel better.
- Have your child drink enough fluid to keep his or her urine clear or pale yellow.
- Follow these instructions if your child has another febrile seizure:
 - Stay calm.
 - Place your child on a safe surface away from any sharp objects.
 - Turn your child's head to the side, or turn your child on his or her side.
 - **Do not** put anything into your child's mouth.
 - **Do not** put your child into a cold bath.
 - **Do not** try to restrain your child's movement.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your child has a fever.
- Your baby who is younger than 3 months has a fever lower than 100°F (38°C).
- Your child has another febrile seizure.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your baby who is younger than 3 months has a fever of 100°F (38°C) or higher.
- Your child has a seizure that lasts longer than 5 minutes.
- Your child has any of the following after a febrile seizure:
 - Confusion and drowsiness for longer than 30 minutes after the seizure.
 - A stiff neck.
 - A very bad headache.
 - Trouble breathing.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your child's condition.
- Will get help right away if your child is not doing well or gets worse.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

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