

What Every Parent Should Know About Febrile Seizures

What is a febrile seizure?

Most of the time when children have a seizure, or a convulsion, it's caused by a fever. These are called "fever seizures" or "febrile seizures." They are very frightening, but they aren't as dangerous as they may appear.

How serious are febrile seizures?

Generally, febrile seizures aren't harmful to a child. Even though seeing your child have a febrile seizure is frightening, your child will be okay. A febrile seizure doesn't cause brain damage. Also, your child can't swallow his or her tongue during a seizure. Febrile seizures usually last just a few minutes and go away on their own. It's very unusual for a febrile seizure to last more than 10 minutes. Usually, a child who has had a febrile seizure does not need to be hospitalized and may not need x-rays or a brain wave test. Your child may only need to be seen by your family doctor so the cause of the fever can be found.

What should I do if my child has a seizure?

- Put your child on his or her side so that he or she won't choke on saliva.
- Don't put anything in his or her mouth.
- Don't restrain your child's movements during the seizure. The most important (and hardest) thing for you to do is to remain as calm as possible. Most seizures stop on their own within a few minutes, so keep your eyes on a clock or watch.
- Call 911 if the seizure lasts more than 10 minutes.

What should I do after the seizure has stopped?

Call your doctor. He or she may want to see your child to find a cause for the fever.

Will my child have more seizures?

The chance of your child having another seizure is 25% to 30%. Most children won't have another seizure. The risk of another febrile seizure is slightly higher if your child is younger than 18 months, if there's a family history of febrile seizures, or if the fever wasn't very high when the seizure occurred.

Can these seizures be prevented with medicine?

Maybe, but many doctors and parents believe the side effects from the medicine are worse than the child having another febrile seizure. Even if medicine is used, it may not prevent another seizure.

If my child has a febrile seizure, does this mean that he or she has epilepsy?

No. A single seizure is never epilepsy. Even repeated febrile seizures aren't considered epilepsy, because children outgrow the risk of having a seizure caused by fever. A child with epilepsy has two or more seizures that aren't caused by fever.

Febrile seizures don't cause epilepsy. But the chance of epilepsy developing in a child who has had a febrile seizure is slightly higher than if he or she didn't have a febrile seizure. The chance of epilepsy developing in a child who has had a febrile seizure is about 2% to 4%. There is a better than 95% chance that your child will not have epilepsy, and there is no evidence that treating your child with medicine will prevent epilepsy.

This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.



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