

Patient information

Discharge advice following a febrile convulsion

Seeing your child have a febrile convulsion can be a very frightening experience. But in most cases, febrile convulsions are over quickly and the child recovers completely and is able to return home.

If it is the first time your child has had a convulsion, take them to the doctor or to hospital or call 999 for an ambulance.

If your child has had a febrile convulsion before they may not need to see a doctor. But always get medical help if you are worried. If your child has more than one seizure in a 24-hour period get medical help.

What is a febrile convulsion?

Febrile convulsions (seizures) are quite common in babies and young children. They are brief convulsions, or fits, that happen because your child has a fever (a high temperature). It usually happens between the ages of 6 months and 6 years. Lots of illnesses can cause a fever. The fevers that most commonly cause a febrile convulsion come from viral infections like flu, coughs and colds. Some vaccines can cause a rise in temperature as a side effect; rarely does this trigger a febrile convulsion. Febrile convulsions are not commonly caused by serious infections.

What does a convulsion look like?

The symptoms can be alarming; your child's body twitches or shakes and they lose consciousness. Or they may go rigid, holding their arms and legs stiffly. They won't look at you or respond to your voice, they may foam at the mouth, vomit, wet or soil themselves. Normally it will be over in a couple of minutes, these are simple febrile convulsions. You may wish to take your child to their G.P. after a simple febrile convulsion.

Sometimes they may twitch or shake more on one side of their body, or it may last longer than 5 minutes, if they are experiencing this then they may be experiencing a complex febrile convulsion and these are more serious and so you should seek medical advice immediately, normally by calling 999.

It is normal for children to be sleepy and confused for a while after the convulsion has stopped.

What should you do if your child has a febrile convulsion?

- Try to stay calm.
- Check the time; it is useful if you can tell your doctor how long the convulsion lasted. If it goes on for more than 5 minutes you should get medical help.
- Roll the child onto their left side if possible.
- Do not restrain or shake your child.
- For babies cradle them in your arms, on their left side, with their feet slightly higher than their head.
- If your child vomits, clear it away from their mouth so they do not choke. But do not put anything into your child's mouth.
- If your child twitches, check whether one or both sides of their body move. If one side jerks more tell your doctor and try to remember which side.

What should you do if your child has a fever?

Most febrile convulsions are over quickly and do not need any treatment. There is no evidence to suggest that Paracetamol and Ibuprofen prevent febrile convulsions and should not be given to your child for this purpose. If your child is distressed and upset while they have a temperature then Paracetamol and Ibuprofen should be given to make your child comfortable. Keep your child lightly dressed and give cool drinks.

What will happen?

A doctor will look for the infection that caused the febrile convulsion. Your child may need treatment for the infection. If your doctor can't see signs of an infection they may take a urine or blood test.

The doctor might admit your child to hospital for a short while, to be kept an eye on. This is more likely if your child is very young.

Doctors sometimes try drugs called anticonvulsants to prevent children who have had several febrile convulsions from having more. Some anticonvulsants may help with this but they are not usually recommended and not all research shows that they help. Also, they often cause side effects, like hyperactivity, tiredness, irritability and speech, movement and sleeping problems.

Children recover completely from a simple febrile convulsion but if your child has had one convulsion they may have another. Children have about a 1 in 3 chance of a second convulsion if they get a fever in the future.

Febrile convulsions do not cause any problems with children's learning or development. Children who have had convulsions do just as well at school as other children. After the age of 6 it is rare for a febrile convulsion to happen.

If a child has a febrile convulsion they have a slightly higher risk of getting epilepsy in later life. Epilepsy is a serious condition where people get repeated convulsions, but this is rare. Only about 1 in 100 healthy children who have had a febrile convulsion go on to get epilepsy.

Further advice

If you are worried or need advice you can call the following departments who can best advise you on what to do:

- Rainbow ward 01284 713315 (24hrs a day)
- Your own GP / GP out of hours
- NHS 111

Stay calm. Check the time to see when it starts.

Move any hard or sharp objects away from the child

Remember: do not put anything in the mouth, do not move a child who is having a seizure

Wait for the seizure to finish.
It is important to stay calm

Stops within 5 minutes

Has not stopped within 5 minutes

- Put your child in the recovery position and reassure
- Make your child as comfortable as possible, including bringing temperature down (see leaflet)
- The child should see a doctor to rule out serious illness

If another seizure starts or the child does not improve

**Call an ambulance
999**

