
Febrile Seizures

Seizures occur when the brain sends out abnormal electrical signals to the body. One common type of seizure in children is linked with a fever. It's called a febrile seizure. Febrile seizures usually occur in children as young as 6 months and up to 5 to 6 years old. They are most commonly seen in toddlers between 12 months and 18 months of age.

Children who have had a febrile seizure may have another febrile seizure before they are 6 years of age. The risk of this goes up if there is a family history of febrile seizures. It also goes up the younger the child is when they have the febrile seizure. For instance, a 6-month-old child who has a febrile seizure is more likely to have another febrile seizure than is a 3-year-old child having a first febrile seizure. Most children outgrow the risk of febrile seizures by age 6.

Febrile seizures can be very scary for parents and caregivers. But they usually don't last long. They rarely cause long-term health problems and are rarely linked to adult epilepsy or seizures. The febrile seizure itself will likely not need to be treated. But the underlying cause of the fever is usually an infection and may need treatment.

Risk factors for febrile seizures

A febrile seizure can be triggered by:

- A bacterial or viral illness or infection. Viral infections are likely to cause high fevers. Examples of these infections include a cold, the flu, chickenpox, or an ear infection.
- A family history of febrile seizures
- A temperature of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher. Seizures often occur at the onset of fever and are usually linked with higher temperatures.
- Some vaccines, but this usually is rare

Types of febrile seizures

Febrile seizures are classified as either simple or complex.

Simple febrile seizures:

- Most common type
- Last less than 15 minutes
- Usually occur only once within 24 hours

Complex febrile seizures:

- Affect only one limb or one side of the body
- Last longer than 15 minutes
- Usually occur more than once within 24 hours

Symptoms of a febrile seizure

Febrile seizures can last for anywhere between a few seconds and several minutes. These are the most common symptoms of febrile seizures:

- Jerking of muscles (convulsions)
- Loss of consciousness
- Biting of cheek or tongue
- Clenched teeth or jaw
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Change in breathing pattern

Children often feel sleepy or confused after the seizure is over. They may have a headache. And they may have no memory of the seizure.

What to do if your child has a seizure

If your child shows signs of having a febrile seizure:

- Stay calm.
- Make a note of the time the seizure started.
- Roll the child onto their side. This is to prevent their choking on saliva or vomit.
- Remove any nearby objects that your child might hit, causing additional injury.
- Loosen any clothing around your child's head and neck.
- Stay with your child until the seizure is over.
- Keep track of how long the seizure lasts.
- Call 911 if the seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes.

Call your child's healthcare provider and report the seizure. Be able to describe what happened before, during, and after the seizure. Ask your healthcare provider about fever-lowering medicines.

What not to do during a seizure

- Don't put your child in a cold bath.
- Don't stop (restrain) your child's movements.
- Don't put anything in your child's mouth.
- Don't try to move or hold down your child's tongue. Your child will not choke on their tongue during a seizure.
- Don't give your child anything to eat or drink until they are awake and alert.

When to call your child's healthcare provider

Call your child's provider right away if your child has any of the following signs or symptoms:

- A seizure for the first time
- A previously diagnosed heart condition
- Another seizure shortly after the first
- Extreme weakness in the arms and legs
- Continuous shakes or tremors
- A lot of pain or a severe headache
- Your child getting worse, or still sick once the fever is down
- Signs of fluid loss (dehydration). These include severe thirst, dark yellow urine, not urinating often, dull or sunken eyes, dry skin, and dry or cracked lips.

Call 911

Call 911 right away if your child:

- Has a seizure that lasts 5 minutes or more
- Has a stiff neck
- Vomits during the seizure
- Remains unconscious, unresponsive, or confused after the seizure
- Has trouble breathing
- Has trouble swallowing or talking
- Has pale or bluish skin
- Is injured during the seizure