

Febrile convulsions

This leaflet is for parents / carers of children fitting due to a raised temperature and explains what a febrile convulsion is, how it is treated and any likely after effects. It also explains any associated risks.

Introduction

Watching your child having a febrile convulsion can be a frightening experience. Many parents think their child is either dead or dying when they first see a febrile convulsion. However, febrile convulsions are not as serious as they look.

What is a febrile convulsion?

A febrile convulsion is caused by a sudden rise in temperature and results in mostly generalised body spasms or shaking. It is seen most commonly in children age 6 months to 6 years. Any illness that causes a high temperature, including a cold or other viral infection, may bring on a convulsion. When a child has a febrile convulsion, he or she will lose consciousness and become stiff. There is sometimes jerking movements of the arms and legs. The words 'convulsion', 'fit' and 'seizure' all mean the same thing.

Is treatment needed?

Most of these episodes last between 1 and 5 minutes and treatment is not usually necessary. If the convulsion lasts for longer than 5 minutes, then treatment will be needed to stop it.

Are there alternative treatments?

There are a range of treatments available for this situation. However, it is usually an urgent situation and the doctor in charge of your child will decide what the best treatment for your child is.

Are febrile convulsions common?

Yes. About 1 child in 30 will have a febrile convulsion by the age of 5 years.

Are there any risks, such as brain damage?

Febrile convulsions are almost always harmless and do not cause brain damage or epilepsy. In an American study, nearly 2000 children were examined carefully for evidence of permanent damage following febrile convulsions and none were found to have such problems.

Is it epilepsy?

No. Epilepsy is when a fit occurs without a fever / temperature. 99 out of 100 children with febrile convulsions never have a convulsion after they reach school age.

Will my child have another febrile convulsion?

There is a chance your child will have a convulsion in the future if they have a temperature. Of 10 children who have had a febrile convulsion, 3 or 4 will have more than one.

Do febrile convulsions cause pain or discomfort?

No. During the convulsion your child is unconscious and unaware of what is happening. The convulsion is much more disturbing for you than your child, but be aware that febrile convulsions do tire children out, and they may remain sleepy or drowsy for a while.

What should I do if my child has another convulsion?

- Lay your child flat on his/her side, with their head at the same level or slightly lower than the body, allowing them to breathe fresh air.
- Take a note of the time; write it down if you can without leaving the child.
- If the convulsion lasts longer than 5 minutes, dial 999 for an ambulance.
- If the convulsion lasts less than 5 minutes and your child recovers, you should inform your GP and have your child checked to ensure he / she does not have an illness which needs investigation or treatment.

What should I do if my child has a temperature/ fever?

Keep the child cool, by keeping the room cool and leave them covered with only light clothing, such as a vest and pants / nappy and socks Give your child fluids to drink and Paracetamol or Ibuprofen as instructed to lower the fever. A fan can be used to cool the room.

If you are concerned about your child or the cause of their temperature it is best to seek medical advice.

Where can I find further information?

Your health visitor and GP will be informed about your child's admission to hospital. If you have any concerns about your child within 24 hours of discharge, you may contact the ward for further advice. You will have been given the number for this. If you have any concerns after 24 hours, contact your GP or NHS 111.

Contacting us

Kempton Day Bed Unit: 0118 322 7512 / 8754 (Mon-Fri 7am-7pm)

Lion/Dolphin Wards: 0118 322 7519 / 8075 (outside of these hours)

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Paediatric Unit, November 2022.

Next review due: November 2024

Compassionate

Aspirational

Resourceful

Excellent