Fever and Seizures (Febrile Seizures)

For most children, fevers cause minor discomfort, but in some, they can trigger seizures. If your child has a seizure when they have a fever, it’s called a febrile seizure. These are common types of seizures in children. They may be the first sign of illness because the seizure may happen before the child has a fever or other symptoms. Children with febrile seizures may not have a seizure each time they’re sick.

Many children get fevers when they’re sick. Medicines like acetaminophen (Children’s Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Children’s Motrin® or Advil®) can help with fevers. These fever-reducing medicines may not prevent a seizure.

Febrile seizures:

- Are common between 6 months to 5 years old.
- May happen again if your child has already had one. It’s likely your child will have more than one febrile seizure if:
  - There is a family history.
  - Their first seizure is before they’re 1 year old.
- Can be scary when you don’t know what they are. They usually don’t last long and don’t cause brain damage, learning disabilities, or epilepsy.
- Usually happen on the first day and in the first few hours of an illness with a fever.
- Can be associated with:
  - A temperature of 100.4°F Fahrenheit (F) or 38°C Celsius (C) or higher.
  - An infection like flu, chickenpox, or an ear infection.
  - A recent vaccine that causes a fever. The fever, not the vaccine, makes it easier to have the seizure.
There are 2 types of febrile seizures:

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<th>Simple (typical)</th>
<th>This is the most common type. A child has 1 seizure in 24 hours that affects their whole body and lasts less than 15 minutes.</th>
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</table>
| Complex (atypical) | • More than 1 seizure in 24 hours.  
• Seizure affects either 1 part or side of the body.  
• A seizure lasts more than 15 minutes. |

**Signs and Symptoms**

During a febrile seizure, a child may:

- Have irregular breathing.  
- Clench the teeth or jaw.  
- Pass out (lose consciousness).  
- Flutter their eyelids or roll the eyes.  
- Stiffen, jerk, or twitch their arm and leg muscles.  
- Pee (urinate) or poop (bowel movement) in their pants.

**What You Can Do**

You can’t make the seizure stop. Do your best to stay calm and keep your child safe.

- If they’re sitting or standing, gently move them to the floor. Remove things nearby they may bump into, like a chair.
- Lay them on their side and turn their head to face downward (Picture 1).
- Loosen tight clothing. If your child wears glasses or hearing aids, remove them.
- Look to see exactly how your child moves and responds to you, so you can describe it later. If your phone is close, take a video of it.
- Write down how long the seizure lasts. If it’s less than 5 minutes, you don’t have to get emergency help. You can update your child’s doctor or health care provider for further direction. For seizures longer than 5 minutes, there may be medicine to give to stop the seizure.

*Source: National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Population Health*
What Not to Do

- **Do not** try to open your child’s mouth or place anything between their teeth. This could injure their gums, break their teeth, or make it easier to choke.
- **Do not** put your fingers into their mouth. They might bite them.
- **Do not** try to stop the movements.
- **Do not** use cold water or add rubbing alcohol to bath water to bring a fever down.

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<th>Call 911 if your child:</th>
<th>• Has seizure that lasts more than 5 minutes. The emergency squad can give your child medicine to stop the seizure.</th>
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<td>• Has trouble breathing, and their skin or lips change color.</td>
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<td>• Chokes on vomit, blood, or other fluid (secretions).</td>
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<td>• Gets injured during a seizure and needs first aid.</td>
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<th>Call your child’s doctor or health care provider if they:</th>
<th>• Have a febrile seizure for the first time.</th>
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<td>• Have more than 1 febrile seizure.</td>
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<td>• Look very ill, are very fussy, or are hard to wake up.</td>
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<td>• Have a stiff neck, a bad headache, very sore throat, a painful stomach ache, an unusual rash,</td>
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<td>• Keep vomiting or have diarrhea.</td>
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<td>• Are younger than 2 months old and have a rectal temperature of 100.4° Fahrenheit (F) or 38° Celsius (C) or higher.</td>
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<td>• Have a fever that comes back and lasts for 3 or more days.</td>
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<td>• Show signs of dehydration, like a dry or sticky mouth, sunken eyes, or not peeing.</td>
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After a Seizure

- When the seizure stops, your child may:
  - Be tired and confused.                              - Be a little cranky.
  - Have a headache.                                   - Feel tired for a day or two.
  - Not remember having a seizure.
• You don’t have to change your lifestyle or the way you care for your child after a febrile seizure.

• Your child can safely sleep in their own crib or bed.

• If your child is acting sick and has other signs of illness, follow their doctor or health care provider’s advice as you normally would.

• Typically, if your child has a febrile seizure, they don’t need to go to a neurologist.