

# 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° Fahrenheit (F) or 38° 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:**

<b>Simple (typical)</b>	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.
<b>Complex (atypical)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More than 1 seizure in 24 hours.</li><li>• Seizure affects either 1 part or side of the body.</li><li>• A seizure lasts more than 15 minutes.</li></ul>

## Signs and Symptoms

During a febrile seizure, a child may:

- Have irregular breathing.
- Flutter their eyelids or roll the eyes.
- Clench the teeth or jaw.
- Stiffen, jerk, or twitch their arm and leg muscles.
- Pass out (lose consciousness).
- 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*

**Picture 1** Lay your child on their side and place their head downward.

## 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.

<b>Call 911 if your child:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Has seizure that lasts more than 5 minutes. The emergency squad can give your child medicine to stop the seizure.</li><li>• Has trouble breathing, and their skin or lips change color.</li><li>• Chokes on vomit, blood, or other fluid (secretions).</li><li>• Gets injured during a seizure and needs first aid.</li></ul>
<b>Call your child's doctor or health care provider if they:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have a febrile seizure for the first time.</li><li>• Have more than 1 febrile seizure.</li><li>• Look very ill, are very fussy, or are hard to wake up.</li><li>• Have a stiff neck, a bad headache, very sore throat, a painful stomach ache, an unusual rash,</li><li>• Keep vomiting or have diarrhea.</li><li>• Are younger than 2 months old and have a rectal temperature of 100.4° Fahrenheit (F) or 38° Celsius (C) or higher.</li><li>• Have a fever that comes back and lasts for 3 or more days.</li><li>• Show signs of dehydration, like a dry or sticky mouth, sunken eyes, or not peeing.</li></ul>

## 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.