

Febrile Convulsions: Information for Parents

This leaflet is for parents whose children have been diagnosed with having a febrile convulsion. It will tell you what this is and how to manage it, should it happen again. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your child's care.

What are febrile convulsions?

Febrile convulsions are a type of fit (seizure) that is triggered by a high temperature in a child. They normally happen between the ages of six months and five years. Approximately five in every one hundred children will have a febrile convulsion by the time they are six years old.

What causes febrile convulsions?

Febrile convulsions occur when children have a temperature usually above 38 degrees Celsius. They can be more common if someone else in the family has had them before. Children who have common viral illnesses such as ear, throat and chest infections and also bacterial infections such as a urinary tract infection may develop these high temperatures.

What are the signs and symptoms of febrile convulsions?

Febrile convulsions can be very scary for the parent and/or caregiver. However they are unlikely to cause harm to your child.

- Most febrile convulsions last between one and five minutes.
- Your child will become dazed and confused.
- They may fall to the floor.
- Your child will become stiff and both arms and legs may start jerking or twitching.
- Their eyes may roll backwards.
- Many children will wet or soil themselves or may bite their tongue.
- After the convulsion has finished they are likely to be sleepy.

Febrile convulsions are described as either 'simple' or 'complex'.

'**Simple**' convulsions will last less than 15 minutes and will not happen again during the same illness.

'**Complex**' convulsions will last more than 15 minutes, affect only one side or part of the body and/or happen again within the same illness.

What do you do if a child is having a febrile convulsion?

- Try to stay calm and make a note of the time when the convulsion starts.
- Stay with the child while the convulsion is happening.
- Ensure the child is safe from harm and move any hard or sharp objects from nearby.
- The safest position in which to put the child is the recovery position with their head tilted slightly backwards.
- Loosen any clothing, especially around the neck.
- **If the convulsion lasts longer than five minutes or the child does not recover quickly then you should call 999.**
- If this is the child's first convulsion they should be reviewed by a doctor.

Can febrile convulsions be prevented?

Unfortunately febrile convulsions cannot be prevented, they usually happen at the start of illness when the temperature is rising rapidly. You can give:

- Paracetamol 4-6 hourly; you must not give more than 4 doses in 24 hours.
- Ibuprofen 6-8 hourly; you must not give more than 3 doses in 24 hours.

These will make your child feel more comfortable and reduce their temperature but they do not prevent the convulsion from happening. You must encourage your child to drink lots of fluids when they are unwell. It is not advised that you cool your child down by using water, stripping down and using fans directly on them, but you should remove any extra clothing.

Can a child have more than one febrile convulsion?

Yes, children have a one in three chance of having another febrile convulsion during episodes of illness. The risk is higher if:

The child at the time of the first febrile seizure was younger than 18 months.

The child's seizure occurred with low grade fever.

There have been multiple seizures in the same febrile illness.

There is a family history of febrile seizures.

Is my child at risk of developing Epilepsy?

The risk of epilepsy after febrile seizures is 2.0–7.5%.

Risks of developing epilepsy later:

Family history of epilepsy in a first-degree relative

Existing neurodevelopmental delay

Existing cerebral palsy

History of complex febrile convulsions.

The vast majority of children do not develop epilepsy with simple febrile seizure. The risk is about 5% with complex febrile seizures. The risk may increase with family history of epilepsy and existing brain damage.

Useful sources of information

Epilepsy Action

<https://www.epilepsy.org.uk/info/seizures/febrile-seizures>

NHS febrile seizures

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/febrile-seizures/>

Further questions

Please contact your local Emergency Department if you have any questions about your child after leaving the hospital. Alternatively, you can contact your local GP or NHS 111 (Freephone) for non-urgent advice.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's outpatient or clinic appointment, including planned admission, please contact your consultant's secretary or the Child Development Centre main desk on 020 8725 1896 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

If you have questions or concerns about your child's medication and day to day management, please contact our epilepsy clinical nurse specialist on 020 8725 2829 or 07917 172730 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

If you have any immediate concerns about your child's febrile convulsions outside of these hours, please contact your GP or NHS direct or bring your child directly to A&E.

Child Development Centre
Ground Floor (Dragon Centre)
Lanesborough Wing

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health. **Web:** www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones. **Tel:** 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all of our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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