

Patient information: Febrile seizures (The Basics)

What are febrile seizures? — Seizures are waves of abnormal electrical activity in the brain. They can make you pass out, or move or behave strangely. “Febrile” means that the seizure is caused by a fever. Febrile seizures occur in children ages 6 months to 6 years old.

How do I know if my child has a fever? — To find out if your child has a fever, take his or her temperature. The most accurate way is to take a rectal temperature. A rectal temperature higher than 100.4°F (38°C) is a fever.

What are the symptoms of a febrile seizure? — During a febrile seizure, a child usually passes out and has jerking movements of the arms, legs, or face. Most febrile seizures last less than 1 or 2 minutes. After a seizure, a child can be confused or sleepy.

Although not as common, some febrile seizures last more than 15 minutes. After a longer seizure, a child can have short-term weakness in his or her arm or leg.

How can I help my child during a seizure? — During a seizure, you should:

- Put your child on his or her side
- Not put anything in your child’s mouth or try to stop the jerking movements
- Keep track of how long the seizure lasts – If it lasts more than 5 minutes, call 9-1-1.

Does my child need to see a doctor or nurse? — Yes. Take your child to the doctor or nurse as soon as possible. He or she will want to make sure that your child’s fever isn’t caused by a serious infection. To do this, your doctor or nurse might need to do tests.

How are febrile seizures treated? — If a febrile seizure stops on its own, it does not need to be treated. If a febrile seizure lasts more than 15 minutes, a doctor will use anti-seizure medicines to stop it.

Your child might also get other treatments, such as:

- Medicines to bring down his or her fever
- Medicines to treat the infection that is causing the fever (if the fever is caused by an infection)

Will my child have more febrile seizures? — It's possible. Children who have 1 febrile seizure have a higher chance of having another 1. Talk with your doctor or nurse about how to treat any fevers that your child gets in the future.

If your child keeps having febrile seizures, your doctor might prescribe medicine so that you can treat your child's seizures at home.

Does a febrile seizure cause brain damage? — No. A febrile seizure does not cause brain damage. It also does not mean that your child will have a life-long seizure condition.