

Febrile convulsions

advice for parents and carers

A febrile convulsion is a fit brought on by a high temperature. Watching one is frightening, but the fit itself is usually harmless and over within a few minutes. This leaflet explains what to do at the time, and what to do afterwards.

Call 999 straight away if

- the fit lasts **longer than 5 minutes**;
- this is your child's **first ever fit**;
- your child has **another fit** before recovering properly from the first;
- your child is **struggling to breathe**, or their lips or face look blue, grey or very pale;
- your child **does not wake up properly** once the fit has stopped;
- your child has a **stiff neck**, dislikes bright light, or has a **rash that does not fade** when you press a glass against it;
- your child is **under 6 months old**, or you are seriously worried for any other reason.

Tower Bridge Hospital London is not an emergency service. In an emergency call 999. The nearest emergency department is the Royal London Hospital, Whitechapel Road, London E1 1FR — a five-minute walk from our front door.

What a febrile convulsion is

1 in 20

children have at least one

**6 months
to 5 years**

the usual age range

**Under 5
minutes**

most fits stop on their own

A febrile convulsion happens when a young child's temperature rises quickly, usually because of an ordinary infection such as a cold, a throat infection, an ear infection or a tummy bug. It is the rise in temperature that triggers the fit, not the illness being especially serious.

It does not mean your child has epilepsy, and a typical febrile convulsion does not cause brain damage or affect learning or development. Most children grow out of them by around the age of five or six.

What it looks like

- Your child becomes unresponsive and may go stiff, or floppy and very still.
- Their arms and legs may jerk or shake, and their eyes may roll back.
- They may wet themselves, dribble, or be sick.
- Afterwards they are often sleepy, confused or irritable for up to an hour. This is normal.

What to do during a fit

Note the time it starts. Five minutes feels far longer than it is, and knowing the exact time helps you and the doctors.

Do

- Lay your child on the floor on their side, with nothing under their head.
- Move away anything hard or sharp they could knock against.
- Loosen tight clothing around the neck.
- Stay with them and let the fit run its course.
- Call 999 if it has not stopped after five minutes.

Do not

- Do not put anything in your child's mouth, including your fingers or medicine.
- Do not hold your child down or try to stop the movements.
- Do not move them unless they are somewhere dangerous.
- Do not put them in a bath or sponge them with cold water.
- Do not give them anything to drink until they are fully awake.

After the fit

- Keep your child on their side until they are properly awake, then let them rest.
- Offer small, frequent drinks once they are alert. Fluids matter more than food.
- Dress them normally. Do not strip them or wrap them up tightly.
- If your child seems uncomfortable, distressed or in pain, you may give **paracetamol or ibuprofen** at the dose for their age and weight on the packet. Follow the manufacturer's instructions and do not exceed the stated dose.
- Keep giving any medicine your doctor has prescribed, such as antibiotics.
- **Never give aspirin** to a child under 16 unless a doctor has specifically prescribed it.

Paracetamol and ibuprofen make a child more comfortable — they do not prevent another convulsion. There is no need to give them around the clock purely in the hope of stopping a fit, and doing so has not been shown to work. Treat your child, not the thermometer.

Will it happen again?

Roughly one child in three who has a febrile convulsion will have another one during a later illness, most often within the following year. Having had a febrile convulsion very slightly increases the chance of developing epilepsy later on, but the great majority of children never do.

If your child has another fit, follow the same steps: note the time, lay them on their side, and call 999 if it lasts more than five minutes or you are worried. Once your child has had a fit assessed by a doctor and the cause is

understood, a short fit that stops on its own does not always need another emergency visit — but do contact a doctor the same day so your child can be checked over.

Book an appointment with us if

- your child remains unsettled, feeds or drinks poorly, or has fewer wet nappies than usual;
- the temperature lasts more than five days, or your child is not improving;
- you are not sure what caused the temperature and would like your child examined;
- you would like to talk through what happened and what to do next time.

We see children seven days a week, usually the same day, with unhurried appointments and a written summary to take away.

Seen today, not next week

Same-day appointments most days, seven days a week, 9am–7pm, on Whitechapel Road.

Book an appointment

or call 020 7916 0029

Where to get help

Tower Bridge Hospital London

97–99 Whitechapel Road, London E1 1DT

020 7916 0029

WhatsApp **07903 284 189**

info@mhwcclinic.co.uk

Open 7 days, 9am–7pm

towerbridgehospital.co.uk

In an emergency

Call 999, or go to the Royal London Hospital Emergency Department, Whitechapel Road, London E1 1FR.

When we are closed and it is not an emergency

Call NHS 111 or visit 111.nhs.uk.

Also able to advise

Your own GP · Your local pharmacist

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Written and reviewed by Dr H Bolat, GP & Clinical Director

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This leaflet is based on current NHS and NICE guidance on febrile seizures in children. It is general information and does not replace advice from a doctor who has examined your child. If your child's condition changes or you are worried, contact us on 020 7916 0029, call NHS 111, or call 999 in an emergency.

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