



# FEBRILE CONVULSIONS: WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

## WHAT IS A FEBRILE CONVULSION

A febrile convulsion (also called a febrile seizure) is a type of seizure that can happen in babies and young children when they have a high fever (usually over 38°C). They are common, usually harmless, and most children recover quickly.

### WHO GETS THEM?

- Most common in children aged 6 months to 6 years
- Often occur during the early stage of an illness, when the temperature is rising fast
- Around 1 in 30 children will have at least one febrile convulsion

(The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, 2023)

### WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

During a febrile convulsion, your child may:

- Stiffen or jerk uncontrollably
- Roll their eyes or go unresponsive
- Lose consciousness
- Go pale or bluish in colour
- Have the seizure last from a few seconds up to 2 minutes

They might be sleepy or confused afterwards – this is called the post-ictal phase.



## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY CHILD HAS A FEBRILE CONVULSION?

### ✔ Stay calm and:

- Lay them on their side (recovery position)
- Keep them safe from injury (move anything dangerous)
- Do not restrain their movements
- Do not put anything in their mouth
- Time the seizure if you can

### ☎ Call Triple Zero (000) for an ambulance if:

- The seizure lasts more than 5 minutes
- They don't wake up after the seizure
- They have trouble breathing
- It's their first seizure
- You're worried or unsure

If your child stops breathing or becomes unconscious, follow DRS ABCD steps and start CPR if needed.

(NSW Health, SCHN Febrile Convulsion Factsheet)

## WHAT DOES A FEBRILE CONVULSION LOOK LIKE?

### What does it look like?

During a febrile convulsion, your child may:

- Stiffen or jerk uncontrollably
- Roll their eyes or go unresponsive
- Lose consciousness
- Go pale or bluish in colour
- Have the seizure last from a few seconds up to 2 minutes
- In some cases, but not commonly - a child may have a longer seizure. This is called a prolonged febrile convulsion, where the seizure lasts longer than 15 minutes. These still usually have a good outcome but always need urgent medical review.

### After the seizure, your child might be:

- Sleepy, confused or floppy
- Drowsy or irritable for a while

This is called the post-ictal phase, it's normal and can last from a few minutes up to an hour.

## CAN FEBRILE CONVULSIONS CAUSE BRAIN DAMAGE OR EPILEPSY?

- No --although they can be frightening to watch, simple febrile convulsions are not harmful.
- There is no evidence that they cause brain damage, and the vast majority of children recover completely.
- Most children do not go on to develop epilepsy or have long-term issues.



## CAN I PREVENT THEM?

- Unfortunately, you can't always prevent febrile convulsions - even with fever medicine.
  - You don't need to give paracetamol or ibuprofen just to stop a seizure - only give it if your child is uncomfortable or in pain.
- (Queensland Health, 2020)

## WILL IT HAPPEN AGAIN?

About **1 in 3 children** who've had one may have another  
The risk is slightly higher if:

- The first seizure happened at a young age
- There is a family history of febrile convulsions
- The fever wasn't very high during the first seizure

(PCH Health WA, 2022)

## WHEN TO SEE YOUR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL?

- If your child has had a seizure for the first time
- If you're unsure about what happened
- For follow-up **after any seizure**
- If your child is unwell and you're concerned

## IMPORTANT KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- ✓ Febrile convulsions can be scary but are usually not dangerous
- ✓ Most children recover well
- ✓ Always see a doctor afterwards
- ✓ Call 000 if you are worried or the seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes

## FOR MORE INFO

- [Sydney Children's Hospitals Network](#)
- [The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne](#)
- [Queensland Health](#)
- [Perth Children's Hospital](#)