NHS
Royal Cornwall Hospitals
NHS Trust

Febrile seizures

Advice for parents and carers

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Your child has had a febrile seizure

We know it is a very frightening experience for you, you may even have thought that your child was dead or dying. Many parents think that when they first see a febrile seizure. However, febrile seizures are not as serious as they look. We have produced this leaflet to provide some facts about febrile seizures.

What is a febrile seizure?

It is a seizure brought on by fever in a child usually aged between 6 months and 5 years.

What is a seizure?

A seizure is an attack in which the person usually becomes unconscious, although this may be for a brief time. The person may become pale and their eyes may roll back, they may become stiff with jerking of the arms and legs. They may be floppy and sleepy afterwards. It is caused by a burst of electrical activity of the brain. The words seizure, fit and convulsion mean the same thing.

Are febrile seizures common?

Yes, about one child in 30 will have had one by the age of 5 years.

What things bring on febrile seizures?

Any illness which causes a high temperature may do. It is usually a cold or other virus infection.

Will it happen again?

Possibly. Of 10 children who have a febrile seizure about 3 will have more than one. The risk of having another gets less after the age of 3 years.

Does the child feel discomfort or pain during a seizure?

No. The child is unconscious and unaware of what is happening. The seizure is much more disturbing to you than the child.

Is regular treatment with tablets or medicine necessary?

Usually not. The doctors will explain to you if your child is thought suitable for regular treatment.

Is it epilepsy?

No. The word epilepsy is applied to repeated seizures without fever.

Do febrile seizures lead to epilepsy?

More than 95% of children with febrile convulsions don't have epilepsy or ever develop epilepsy, a very small number do develop epilepsy and this is usually in those who have had very prolonged febrile convulsions or many febrile convulsions.

What should I do in the future if my child is unwell?

If your child appears very unwell seek medical help. If they are mildly unwell they may need to be seen by their GP to check for the cause of the infection.

What should I do if my child has another seizure?

Lay them on a flat surface on their side, with their head at the same level or slightly lower than the body. If your child is moving a lot they may not stay on their side. If this is the case allow them to stay on their back,

and remove any objects that they could injure themselves on. Place the child on his/ her side once movements have decreased sufficiently.

Note the time (write it down if you can without leaving the child).

It is not necessary to do anything else.

Do not:

- try to place a gag in the mouth
- try to force anything into the mouth
- slap or shake the child.

Wait for the seizure to stop.

In some cases, where your child has had multiple febrile seizures or is at increased risk of recurrence. The hospital may give you medication to insert into your child's mouth. This is called midazolam; your child should be given the following dose

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It should be used if the seizure carries on for more than 5 minutes.

This should stop the seizure within a further 5 minutes. If it does not, bring the child to the hospital (dial 999 if necessary at this stage). In any event, let your doctor know what has happened.

What should I do to help if my child has a fever?

- Keep your child comfortable, but do not completely undress or sponge them with water.

- Do not overclothe them or overheat the room.
- Give plenty of fluids to drink.
- Give children's paracetamol medicine if they are distressed by fever.
- Do not give more than the recommended dose in 24 hours (written on the paracetamol bottle label).

If the child seems ill, or has earache or sore throat, arrange for your child to see a doctor, in case they need any other treatment such as antibiotics. (For most children with fever due to virus infection, antibiotics are not necessary).

Use paediatric Ibuprofen if paracetamol does not help relieve your child's distress. **Do not give both medications at the same time.**

Do febrile seizures cause permanent brain damage?

Almost never. One large study of 2000 children who were examined carefully for evidence of permanent damage following febrile seizures, none was found. It is thought that, very rarely, a child who has a very prolonged febrile seizure lasting for half an hour or more may suffer damage from it.

Contact information

If your child has been given open access to the Paediatric Observation Unit, please contact 01872 253468 for advice.

Further information

If you have any other questions please contact your GP.

Further information and advice is also available from:

www.nhs.uk/Pages

Search for fever in children in the Health A-Z section.

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690

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