



# Febrile Seizure

## What are febrile seizures?

Seizures are waves of abnormal electrical activity in the brain which can cause unusual movements and even brief loss of consciousness. "Febrile" means that the seizure is caused by a fever. There is debate as to whether they are caused by the height of the fever or how quickly the fever rises. Febrile seizures are not uncommon; they occur in up to 5% of children ages 6 months to 5 years old and they often run in families. Despite how scary these are for a parent to witness; **they are actually harmless.**

## What are the symptoms of a febrile seizure?

During a febrile seizure, the child usually "looks strange" for a few moments and then has jerking movements of the arms, legs, or face. He/she may pass out or may just be unresponsive for a brief period of time. Most febrile seizures last less than 5 minutes, typically less than 1 minute (though if you are the parent, it may feel like forever!). Although not as common, some febrile seizures last more than 15 minutes. When the seizure is over, the child might be confused or sleepy for a brief time but then should quickly return to normal.

## How can I help my child during a seizure?

- Put your child on their side
- Avoid putting anything in your child's mouth or trying to stop the jerking movements
- Keep track of seizure length – If it lasts more than 5 minutes, call 9-1-1 for an ambulance

## How are febrile seizures treated?

If a febrile seizure stops on its own, it does not require a medication other than a fever reducer to help with the fever. If a febrile seizure lasts more than 5 minutes, a doctor might need to use anti-seizure medicines to stop it. Additional treatments recommended could include, a fever reducer (acetaminophen or ibuprofen), medication to treat the infection that is causing the fever (if the fever is caused by a bacterial infection), and fluids to treat dehydration (if the infection is causing vomiting or diarrhea).

## Will my child have more febrile seizures?

It's possible. Children who have 1 febrile seizure have a higher chance of having another. Talk with your provider about how to treat any fevers that your child gets in the future. If febrile seizures reoccur, your provider will likely recommend seeing a neurologist. Because additional knowledge allows you to the ability to prepare, which may alleviate some very normal parental anxiety, this chart helps determine the likelihood of seizure recurrence.

**Table 2. Risk of Recurrence After an Initial Febrile Seizure**

Risk factors	Number of risk factors	2-year risk of recurrence (%)
Age < 18 months		
Duration of fever < 1 hour before seizure onset	0	14
	1	> 20
First-degree relative with febrile seizure	2	> 30
Temperature < 104°F (40°C)	3	> 60
	4	> 70

*Information from reference 30.*

American Family Physician: Febrile Seizures: Risks, Evaluation, and Prognosis

## Does a febrile seizure cause brain damage?

No. Thankfully, a febrile seizure does not cause brain damage! It also does not mean that your child will have a life-long seizure condition. If we you can only remember one thing from this handout, this is it: despite how scary these are for a parent to witness, **they are actually harmless and your child is going to be okay!**

## When to call:

We are here for you anytime if you have other questions or concerns!

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Reference: UpToDate, American Family Physician: <https://www.aafp.org/pubs/afp/issues/2019/0401/p445.html>