



About Febrile Seizures

Febrile seizures are one of the scariest things that a parent can experience. Whether you have heard about them before or not, if it happens to your child, the initial response is always panic—you think your child is dying. But they're not! Some parents might not know that about 2-4% of children can be susceptible to having a seizure triggered by the onset of a fever. The age when children can have this happen is 6 months to 5 years, with a peak about 3 years of age.

It doesn't really matter what the cause of the fever is, a viral infection, an ear infection, the flu and so on. But it's believed to be the rate of rise of fever that can trigger the seizure and not necessarily how HIGH the fever gets. So often times the first sign that a child has a fever is the onset of the seizure. That can literally be a "rude awakening" in the night!

Now this is probably one of the scariest things that a parent can experience with their child: they go from seeming totally fine, or maybe a bit "under the weather" to losing consciousness and shaking uncontrollably. The good news is that even though parents might think their child is dying, febrile seizures are NOT harmful. It is just another strange thing that kids sometimes do to freak their parents out.

Here are some important facts you should know as a parent so you can be informed and ready just in case this happens to your child. Most febrile seizures last about 1-2 minutes. This isn't very long.....but it can seem like an eternity when you are witnessing this happening to your kid. Timing is important however, so if it happens, look at your watch and note the time, or even better, start a stopwatch on your phone.

If your child starts having a seizure, the first thing to do is make sure they are safe and not going to fall off the bed or couch or otherwise hurt themselves. Put them on their side, so any saliva doesn't pool in the back of their throat. Don't try to "restrain" them or keep them from moving, it won't make it stop and you could hurt them. Don't put anything in their mouth.

If a febrile seizure goes on for more than 5 minutes, call 9-1-1. This is true for any kind of seizure in a child or adult. The reason for this is that in general, if a seizure goes on for more than 20 minutes, that *can* be harmful for the brain. It takes a few minutes for EMTs to get to you, so if you call at 5 minutes, they will get there before the 20 minutes pass and if the seizure is still going (which is very unlikely) they can give medication to stop it.

Now nobody is **ever** going to fault a parent or caretaker for calling 9-1-1 right away, and if it is the first time your child has had a febrile seizure, it is probably a good idea. If you have been through it before and established that your child is prone to these, then you don't necessarily have to call 9-1-1 every time. If the seizure stops after a minute or two and the child recovers and looks OK, then you can just watch them.

The question then becomes "Why does the child have a fever." If the answer is straightforward: they are getting a cold or have signs of a stomach bug or ear infection, then you can treat the fever with acetaminophen or ibuprofen and call for an office visit with their doctor. If it is **not** clear why they have a fever or if they "just don't look right," then they probably should get seen sooner rather than later. If it's nighttime, then the Emergency Department might be the right choice.

Reasons to call 9-1-1 for febrile seizures:

1. The seizure lasts for more than 5 minutes.
2. The child has more than 1 seizure within 24 hours.
3. The child has a "focal" seizure, meaning only part of their body seems to shake or be involved.
4. If the child just "doesn't look right" when the seizure ends.

Now febrile seizures often times run in families. So if a parent had them as a child, then their children may be at higher risk. If one child in a family has had a febrile seizure, then their siblings will have a higher likelihood of having them.

Once a child has had one febrile seizure, then they have a 50% chance of having another one at some point in the future. If you are a *glass half-full* kind of person, that also means that they have a 50% chance of **never** having one again!

If a child has had 2 separate episodes of febrile seizures, then they have an 80% chance of having a third one. What this means is the more febrile seizures a child has, the more likely they are to have another one in the future. The good news is that kids outgrow this tendency. Any child age 6 or older who has a seizure, should probably be evaluated by a pediatric neurologist as this is outside of the normal age range of being consider a "febrile seizure."

Keep in mind, most kids will **never** have this happen, but 2-4% of children are prone to having seizures with the onset of fever. It's good to know about these kind of things **before** they happen so you can be an informed parent. And maybe with this knowledge you won't freak out quite as much if this happens to your child.....although honestly just about everybody freaks out.....that is normal.

--Be Well!

Drew Nash, MD