What is a febrile convolution?
A febrile (fever) convulsion is a fit or seizure that occurs in children with a fever. The fever may not be obvious before the fit, as it usually comes on very quickly. This rapid change in temperature causes the seizure, not how high the temperature is.

Most fits last less than two minutes, but can range from a few seconds to up to 15 minutes. Your child may be drowsy after a fit.

Seizures usually happen in children aged from six months to six years of age. Febrile convulsions are very common, about one in 20 children will have one.

What causes a febrile convolution?
Febrile convulsions happen when there is a sudden change in body temperature. The cause of the fever is usually a viral illness. Trying to treat the fever (such as by giving paracetamol) will not prevent a febrile convulsion. Febrile convulsions tend to run in families, although the reason for this is not known.

What is fever?
Fever is the body’s normal response to an infection and is usually harmless. For a child, this occurs when the body temperature reaches above 38ºC.

If your child has a fever:
- keep them cool by not overdressing them or having their room too hot
- fanning or tepid sponging/bathing is not recommended for children with a fever as it may cause shivering and distress
- give them plenty to drink (it is best to give small frequent drinks, or sips, of water)
- give paracetamol (such as Panadol or Dymadon) or ibuprofen (such as Nurofen) if your child has pain or is miserable
- carefully check the label for the correct dose and make sure you are not giving your child any other products containing paracetamol or ibuprofen (such as some cough medicines and cold and flu preparations).
- Paracetamol or ibuprofen do not prevent febrile convulsions.

What are the symptoms?
A febrile convulsion is very frightening for parents and caregivers. The signs and symptoms usually include:
- loss of consciousness (a ‘blackout’)
- twitching or jerking of arms and legs
- difficulty breathing and/or foaming at the mouth going pale or blue in colour
- the eyes rolling back so only the whites are visible.

Your child may take up to 30 minutes to wake up properly afterwards. They may be irritable during this time and appear not to recognise you.

What should I do if my child has a fit?
Stay calm and do not panic.
- Do not force or put anything into the child’s mouth, including your fingers.
- Ensure your child is safe by placing them on the floor and removing any objects that could injure them.
- Note the time the fit started and stopped, to tell the doctor.
- Once the fit has stopped place your child on their side and make them comfortable.
- Do not shake or slap your child to wake them.
- Do not restrain your child.
- Take your child to your local doctor, health care professional or emergency department as soon as possible.

If you are very worried call an ambulance (dial 000).
What to expect

- Children suffer no pain or discomfort during a fit.
- A febrile convulsion is not epilepsy. No regular medication is needed.
- A short fit will not cause brain damage. Even a long fit almost never causes harm.
- Children who have febrile convulsions normally grow up healthy and do not have any permanent damage from seizures.
- One in three babies and children who have had one febrile convulsion will have another. There is no way of predicting who will be affected or when this will happen.
- Children usually have fewer seizures as they get older, and most seizures stop completely by the age of six.

Seeking help

Cabrini Emergency Department (ED) is staffed by experienced emergency doctors and nurses 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. If you have any questions about your ED treatment our qualified ED staff can be contacted on 9508 1500 at any time. If you need to return to Cabrini ED for ongoing care we would be glad to take care of you again and if this occurs within a week of your initial consultation the doctor’s fee will be bulk-billed.

In a medical emergency return to Cabrini ED if it is safe to do so or go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance (dial 000).

For other medical problems see your local doctor or health care professional or return to Cabrini ED.

Want to know more?

- Contact Cabrini ED on 9508 1500
- Ask your local doctor or health care professional.
- Visit the Royal Children’s Hospital website www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo
- Visit the Better Health Channel www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Notes:

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