

Febrile convulsions

What are febrile convulsions?

Febrile convulsions are fits or seizures that occur in young children when they have a high fever (a fever greater than 38°C). A *convulsion* (fit) is a sudden event when the child is 'not quite with it', starts to jerk or twitch and may have difficulty in breathing.

What causes them?

They only occur when the child has a high temperature. The growing brains of little children are more sensitive to fever than are more mature brains, and when the normal brain activity is upset a fit can occur.

The fever is caused by an infection, which is usually a viral infection and often is not obvious. A simple viral infection that would give an adult a heavy cold is the type often responsible. Sometimes the doctor may find an infected ear or throat or bladder.

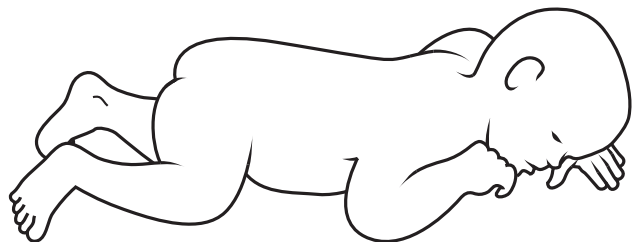
What is a rigor?

A *rigor* or a chill is an episode of uncontrolled shivering which lasts for 10 to 20 minutes. It may be associated with shaking and teeth chattering. A rigor is sometimes mistaken for a febrile convulsion.

Who gets febrile convulsions?

They are common and can affect any normal child. About 5 in every 100 children will have a fit from a fever. They tend to run in families.

They usually occur in children from 6 months to 3 years of age, the most common age range being 9 to 20 months; they usually stop by 6 years of age.



The correct positioning of a child during a fit

What are the risks?

Febrile convulsions (whether one or several) in normal children do not usually cause brain damage or epilepsy. Most children are absolutely normal later on. One problem is that about 25 to 50% will go on to have another seizure.

How do you manage a convulsion?

1. Place the child on his or her side, chest down, with the head turned to one side. Never lie a fitting or unconscious child on his or her back. Do not force anything into the child's mouth. The primary concern is to keep the child's airway open.
2. Undress the child to their singlet and underpants to keep them cool.
3. Obtain medical help as soon as possible. Ring or go to your local doctor or to your nearest hospital. Even if the fit stops, have your child checked.

How do you help prevent another episode?

Because some children have further febrile convulsions, it is important to manage any fever as soon as it is noticed. Undress the child down to singlet and underpants, keep the child cool, and give fluids and paracetamol mixture.

Key points

- Febrile convulsions may occur again.
- They usually occur from 6 months to 3 years of age.
- They cause no long-term problems.
- They do not cause death, brain damage or epilepsy.
- They stop by 6 years of age.