Febrile Seizures (Convulsions with Fever)

Febrile convulsions are seizures triggered by high fever. They are the most common type of convulsion. They usually are harmless. The children are usually between 6 months and 4 years of age. Most first seizures occur by 2 years of age. The average temperature at which they occur is 104° F (40° C). The fever can be caused by an infection. Seizures may last 1 to 10 minutes without any treatment.

Most children have just one febrile seizure in a lifetime. Other children have one to three recurrences over the next few years. Febrile seizures usually stop occurring by 5 or 6 years of age. They do not cause any brain damage; however, a few children may later have seizures without a fever.

REDUCE THE FEVER

Bringing your child's fever down quickly may shorten the seizure. Remove your child's clothing and apply cold washcloths to the head and neck. Sponge the rest of the body with cool water. This will help the temperature fall. When the seizure is over and your child is awake, only give your child over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by their caregiver. Encourage cool fluids. Dress your child lightly. Bundling up sick infants may cause the temperature to go up.

PROTECT YOUR CHILD'S AIRWAY DURING A SEIZURE

Place your child on his/her side to help drain secretions. If your child vomits, help to clear their mouth. Use a suction bulb if available. If your child's breathing becomes noisy, pull the jaw and chin forward.

During the seizure, do not attempt to hold your child down or stop the seizure movements. Once started, the seizure will run its course no matter what you do. Do not try to force anything into your child's mouth. This is unnecessary and can cut his/her mouth, injure a tooth, cause vomiting, or result in a serious bite injury to your hand/finger. Do not attempt to hold your child's tongue. Although children may rarely bite the tongue during a convulsion, they cannot “swallow the tongue.”

Call 911 immediately if the seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes or as directed by your caregiver.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

Oral-Fever Reducing Medications

Febrile convulsions usually occur during the first day of an illness. Use medication as directed at the first indication of a fever (an oral temperature over 98.6° F or 37° C, or a rectal temperature over 99.6° F or 37.6° C) and give it continuously for the first 48 hours of the illness. If your child has a fever at bedtime, awaken them once during the night to give fever-reducing medication. Because fever is common after diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTP) immunizations, only give your child over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by their caregiver.

Fever Reducing Suppositories

Have some acetaminophen suppositories on hand in case your child ever has another febrile seizure (same dosage as oral medication). These may be kept in the refrigerator at the pharmacy, so you may have to ask for them.

Light Covers or Clothing

Avoid covering your child with more than one blanket. Bundling during sleep can push the temperature up 1 or 2 extra degrees.

Lots of Fluids

Keep your child well hydrated with plenty of fluids.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your child's neck becomes stiff.
- Your child becomes confused or delirious.
- Your child becomes difficult to awaken.
- Your child has more than one seizure.
- Your child develops leg or arm weakness.
- Your child becomes more ill or develops problems you are concerned about since leaving your caregiver.
- You are unable to control fever with medications.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

Document Released: 06/13/2002 Document Re-Released: 03/16/2010
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