



My 18 month old grandson was hospitalised with a “febrile fit” on the weekend. I am very concerned. How dangerous is this? Will this have any effect on his development? Can it happen again?

Febrile fits are very common, occurring in about 3% of children between the ages of 6 months and 6 years of age. Febrile fits are believed to be caused by a rapid increase in the child’s temperature rather than how high the temperature is. It will often occur before you realise the child has a fever! A simple febrile fit will be short (lasting less than 5 minutes). You will notice the child may suddenly lose consciousness, stiffen or become floppy and his eyes may roll backwards. He may then develop sustained jerking movements of all limbs. Although when witnessing a seizure, all parents believe their child is dying, the outcome is generally very good. Febrile fits are not thought to cause any “brain damage”. Studies have shown that the development and performance on IQ tests of children who have had febrile fits is the same as those who have not had any febrile fits.

About 30% of children who have had one febrile fit will have another febrile fit at some stage. This means most children will only have the one fit! If your child has another fit, the best approach is to stay calm. If you can remember, take note of the time the seizure starts and finishes. While most fits last for less than 5 minutes, it will feel like an eternity! Gently lay the child in a safe place, ideally clear a space on the floor where the child cannot hurt himself. Do not leave your child on a bed or raised surface where he can fall. You may place your child on his side in the “recovery position”. Do not put anything into your child’s mouth. He will not swallow his tongue but he might give you a very nasty bite on your fingers! Dial 000. The fit is likely to have stopped by the time the Ambulance arrives. It is normal for your child to be a bit drowsy for a period of time after a fit. If it is your child’s first fit then you should take him to hospital for further assessment. The main reason to take a child to hospital after a febrile fit is to identify the cause of the fever.

You may choose to use paracetamol / ibuprofen next time your child has an illness with a fever. This will not necessarily prevent any further seizures from occurring but may help your child to feel a little better.