

Idaho Falls Pediatrics

Convulsions

What are convulsions?

During a convulsion (seizure), a child becomes unconscious and falls, the eyes roll backward, the body stiffens, and the arms and legs jerk. Most seizures last less than 5 minutes. Convulsions (that are not caused by a fever) occur in 1 out of every 250 children. If they become recurrent, the child is said to have epilepsy.

What causes convulsions?

The usual cause of recurrent seizures without a fever (epilepsy) is a small area in the brain tissue that sometimes sends abnormal messages to other areas of the brain. Recurrent seizures can usually be controlled with special medicines (anticonvulsants). Other common causes are head injury, poisoning, low blood sugar, or low levels of calcium in the blood.

What should I do when my child has a convulsion?

- **Leave your child on the floor or ground.**

During a seizure your child should be left on the floor or ground. Move him only if he is in a dangerous place.

- **Protect your child's airway.**

If your child has anything in the mouth, clear it with a finger to prevent choking. Place your child on the side or abdomen (face down) to help drain secretions. If the child vomits, help clear the mouth. Use a suction bulb if available. If your child's breathing becomes noisy, pull the jaw and chin forward by placing two fingers behind the corner of the jaw on each side (this will automatically bring the tongue forward).

- **Common mistakes in first aid for convulsions**

During the seizure, don't try to restrain your child or stop the seizure movements. Once started, the seizure will run its course no matter what you do.

Don't try to resuscitate your child just because breathing stops momentarily for 5 to 10 seconds. Instead, try to clear the airway. Don't try to force anything into your child's mouth. This is unnecessary and can cut the mouth, injure a tooth, cause vomiting, or result in a serious bite of your finger. Don't try to hold the tongue. Children may rarely bite the tongue during a convulsion, but they can't swallow the tongue.

- **Time the length of the seizure.**

Although it is difficult to do, try to use a watch or the clock to measure how long the seizure lasts.

How can I take care of my child?

- **Treatment for previously diagnosed convulsions**

After the seizure is over, let your child sleep if he wishes. The brain is temporarily exhausted, and there is no point in trying to keep your child awake. There is no need to bring your child to an emergency room for every seizure.

When you discuss your child's treatment with your health care provider, ask if you should give your child an extra dose of anticonvulsant medicine right after a seizure to prevent another seizure. If your child has recently missed a dose of anticonvulsant medicine, twice the usual dose may be needed.

Children taking certain anticonvulsant medicines should have their blood tested periodically. Ask your doctor if and when your child should have blood tests.

- **Precautions**

While most sports are safe, be certain your child avoids activities that would be unsafe if he suddenly had a seizure.

These include activities at heights (for example, climbing a tree or rope), cycling on a highway, or swimming alone. Wind surfing, scuba diving, and hang gliding must also be avoided. Have him take showers instead of baths and only when someone else is in the house.

When should I call Idaho Falls Pediatrics?

Call IMMEDIATELY if:

- Your child has never had a seizure before.
- The seizure lasts more than 5 minutes. (Note: If the seizure lasts more than 10 minutes, you probably should call an ambulance. In general, a seizure won't hurt the brain unless it continues for at least 30 minutes.)
- Your child has epilepsy and:
 - The seizures are not in good control.
 - Another seizure occurs.
 - Your child stays confused or groggy for more than 2 hours.

*NOTE: This information is provided as a public educational service. The information does not replace any of the instructions your physician gives you. If you have a medical emergency please call 911 or the Hospital at (208) 529-6111. If you have questions about your child's care, please call Idaho Falls Pediatrics at (208) 522-4600.