

Psychogenic Non-Epileptic Seizures (PNES)

Non-epileptic seizures (PNES) are episodes of a temporary loss of control that may involve convulsions, change in consciousness, or both. These events cannot be controlled by the people who have them. Other terms for PNES include:

- pseudo-seizures,
- psychogenic spells,
- attacks or events.

Epileptic seizures are caused by abnormal electrical firing in the brain and non-epileptic seizures are **not**. The symptoms are real.

PNES is often mistaken for epilepsy. Of the patients referred for epilepsy testing, 1 in 5 have PNES. It is most common among adolescents and young adults but can occur in any age.

Symptoms

PNES can look like epileptic seizures. Someone might shake or fall down during an attack. There might be staring spells or other symptoms that look like epileptic seizures. Your provider may suspect you have PNES based on the details of your symptoms. You might be asked to describe:

- Triggers
- Types of movements
- Length of events
- How often they happen

Diagnosis

One aim of testing is to rule out epilepsy. The best way to diagnose PNES is by using video-EEG (electroencephalogram). This test records electrical activity in the brain. Testing may take hours or days until seizure-like symptoms occur.

Causes

We do not fully understand the cause of these attacks, but they are often stress-induced. They may occur because of past traumatic events. Such events can produce physical symptoms in people without physical illness.

Extreme stress can cause physical illness. You may blush when embarrassed or have sweaty palms and faster heart rate as part of a “stage fright” reaction. PNES is one type of physical symptom some people have in response to their extreme stressors.

Treatment

Medicines used to treat epilepsy do not control PNES. Learning more about your diagnosis can help reduce or stop these events. If you have any questions about PNES, talk to your doctor.

Treatment options include:

- Therapy
- Lowering stress
- Personal support

Mental health providers are best prepared to provide treatment. This could include psychiatrists, psychologists and clinical social workers. We have specially trained providers to assist with PNES. With proper treatment, 7 of every 10 adults stop having PNES.

Websites for More Information

Epilepsy Foundation:
<https://www.epilepsy.com>
<http://www.neurosymptoms.org>