

New Onset of Seizures

What is a seizure?

Your body reacts to normal electrical signals sent from the brain to different parts of your body. A seizure occurs when the brain has a sudden burst of these electrical signals that is not normal. This disrupts the normal function of your body for a brief time.

Epilepsy is a chronic condition that makes people prone to having seizures that recur and are often without triggers.

What does a seizure look like?

Signs of a seizure can be very different for each person. Some may include:

- Twitching of one specific part of the body
- Violent, uncontrolled shaking of the body
- Staring off into space
- Lip smacking
- Memory loss
- Eyes “rolling back into the head”
- Sudden loss of consciousness

What causes a seizure?

There are many causes of seizures. Sometimes, we do not know what triggers a seizure. Other times, causes may include:

- Congenital (born with seizures)
- High fevers
- Tumors in the brain
- Blood in the brain
- Stroke
- Aneurysm in the brain
- Cyst in the brain
- Head injury
- Infection
- Very low blood sugar
- Withdrawal from medicines or drugs
- Withdrawal from alcohol
- Illnesses like meningitis or encephalitis
- Lack of oxygen to the brain

Phases of Seizure Activity

There are 3 phases of a seizure.

- **Aura:** a sensation or feeling you might have before the physical part of the seizure begins.
- **Ictal:** the time during which the seizure occurs.
 - Family and staff should protect you from self-harm during the seizure.
 - They should avoid putting anything into your mouth, as this will only cause more irritation.
 - They should also try to keep your head away from any hard objects.
- **Post-ictal:** the time after the seizure.
 - You may feel weak and sleepy. You could be hard to wake up or may be confused.

Will I always have seizures?

The cause of your seizures will impact how long you are likely to have seizures. Some seizures don't recur after the cause is treated. Other seizures persist even after the cause has been treated. Your doctor will have a better idea of how long you can expect to have seizures.

How do you diagnose a seizure?

- Health history
- Physical exam
- Blood tests
- EEG (electroencephalography) records the electrical activity in your brain. Pain-free electrodes are placed on your scalp to record the test results.
- MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) uses a very strong magnet to make a “picture” of your brain.

- CT or CAT scan (computed tomography) also makes a “picture” of your brain, but it can show different images than an MRI.

How do you treat a seizure?

Medicine: You may be placed on one or more medicines, based on how your body reacts to the treatment. This is the first step for seizure control. **Do not stop taking your medicines without talking with your doctor first.**

Surgery: Reasons for surgery depend on where the seizures come from in the brain and if medicines do not help stop the seizures. It can also depend on the cause. Causes can include tumors, cysts, aneurysms, or blood in the brain.

Types of Surgery:

- Craniotomy: to remove a tumor, cyst, blood or aneurysm that may be causing the seizures.
- Lobectomy: to remove the part of the brain that is the source of seizures.
- Vagal nerve stimulator: a device that sends electrical signals to the vagus nerve, a large nerve that leads to the brain.

How will seizures affect my activities?

- Until your seizures are well controlled, you will not be allowed to drive.
- Limit alcohol and illegal drug use. Both can cause seizures and may interact with your seizure medicines.

- You may have mild memory loss from the seizures which could affect your daily routines.
- Do not swim alone. Be sure to have friends or family with you.
- Keep bathroom doors unlocked while bathing. If you have a seizure while in the bathroom, others can help you more quickly.

Resources

You can still lead an active life despite having seizures. These guidelines are to help keep you safe. If you have questions, ask your doctor or nurse. You may find the resources on the next page helpful also.

Epilepsy Foundation
4351 Garden City Drive
Landover, MD 20785
Toll free (sponsored by Novartis):
800-EFA-1000 (English and Spanish)
Fax: 301-577-4941
Web site: www.efa.org

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke - Office of Scientific and Health Reports
Room 8A-06, MSC 2540
31 Center Drive
Bethesda, MD 20892-2540
Toll free: 800-352-9424
Web site: www.ninds.nih.gov

The American Academy of Neurology
1080 Montreal Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55116
Phone: 651-695-1940
Web site: www.aan.com

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