

Epilepsy is a fairly common disorder characterised by seizures which occur when there is a sudden uncontrolled surge in the normal electrical activity in all, or a part of the brain. It affects people at all levels of intelligence and can develop at any stage of life, however, most people will experience their first seizure by 20 years of age.

Although the cause is unknown, in many cases it can result from severe head injuries, birth problems or brain infections. There are two main types of seizures: generalised seizures and partial seizures. These are also known as 'Grand-Mal' and 'Petit-Mal', although the terminology used at present consists of three major types of seizures: Tonic-Clonic, Absence Seizures and Temporal Lobe or Psychomotor Epilepsy.

TONIC-CLONIC

ALSO KNOWN AS GRAND-MAL OR GENERALISED SEIZURES INVOLVING THE WHOLE BRAIN /

Information courtesy of the Health Promotion Directorate, Health Department of Western Australia. www.health.wa.gov.au

In this type of seizure, the person suddenly becomes rigid and unconscious. He/she may begin to shake, or to convulse, with vigorous and regular muscle contractions. Saliva may bubble from the mouth and if the tongue or lips have been bitten, there may be a little blood as well. Sometimes the intense muscular contraction at the onset of the seizure causes a cry as the air is forced from the lungs, and the bladder may empty for the same reason. Attacks of this kind are usually over within 4 or 5 minutes and most people will then sleep for half an hour afterwards, and may be drowsy and confused on awakening.

A 'prodrome' or an 'aura' often precedes the actual attack. Depending on whether the warning is long lasting or brief, the name prodrome or aura is applied to it. A prodrome is a sensation lasting for several hours before an attack. For example, it may be a feeling of tension, depression or less commonly, excitement or elation. Much more common is the occurrence of a brief warning or aura.

There are a great variety of auras. They can include strange smells, tingling in the hands or a disturbance in the stomach. Though it can be frightening, the aura can also be useful and often allows the person enough time to lie or sit down and avoid hurting themselves when the attack begins.

ABSENCE SEIZURES (PETIT-MAL EPILEPSY)

This form of seizure is most common in primary school-aged children and consists of a momentary lapse of consciousness (from 5 to 30 seconds) without any falling or convulsions. Sometimes the eyes may blink rapidly, or turn upwards for a moment, or there may be minor twitching movements of part of the face or body. These brief attacks often pass unnoticed, or are mistaken for day-dreaming, or lack of concentration. In some cases, they may occur many times a day and can cause quite marked problems, particularly with learning in the classroom. The person with this form of Epilepsy may be unaware that they have had a seizure. Treatment is important to control the possible development of other types of seizures.

TEMPORAL LOBE OR PSYCHOMOTOR EPILEPSY

ALSO KNOWN AS COMPLEX PARTIAL SEIZURES

This is a common form of seizure occurring at any age. The attack is characterised by a very wide variety of manifestations. The attack may consist of strange disturbing, brief subjective feelings, such as an unpleasant taste, unpleasant smell, a visual hallucination, the hearing of noises, a sense of strangeness in familiar surroundings, or odd familiarity with places never seen before (déjà vu). Whatever the symptoms, the attacks are brief (1 to 5 minutes). They are usually constant and specific to the individual, and are only briefly disturbing. Psychomotor Seizures last the same time. The person with this type of Epilepsy performs complex movements eg. breaking off a conversation to walk aimlessly around a room, or aimlessly move objects around a table. He/she may appear to be conscious but can recall nothing afterwards.

EPILEPSY

WHAT DO I DO WHEN A PERSON HAS A SEIZURE?

This information has been supplied by Epilepsy Queensland Inc. www.eqi.org.au

Keep Calm

- ⦿ The person is not in pain.
- ⦿ The tongue cannot be swallowed so there is no need to place anything in the mouth.
- ⦿ Do not force the jaw apart.
- ⦿ It may help to continually talk to the person having the seizure and to reassure them.

For Safety

- ⦿ Remove objects from the area that may cause injury.
- ⦿ Place something soft under the head.
- ⦿ Do not restrain the person's movements.

For Recovery

- ⦿ When the seizure has finished, place the person in the Recovery position.

Do not give medicine or fluid until the person is fully conscious. If the person has continual Tonic-Clonic attacks, one following the other in rapid succession, or the seizure lasts more than 10 minutes, seek medical attention immediately.

WHAT DO I SAY TO THE OTHER CHILDREN?

An Epileptic seizure may cause the child to be embarrassed, tired and frightened, and their language may become disoriented. Children and adults watching the seizure may be concerned for the child. Reassure the children that the child is alright; staying calm in these situations will also reassure the other children that everything is under control. Many children feel that the child is hurt in some way. Inform the children about Epilepsy. You may wish to use suitable books and videos in explaining Epilepsy to children.

SOME POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN CARING FOR A CHILD WITH EPILEPSY

- ⦿ Allow the child to have time to complete tasks.
- ⦿ Use the child's alert periods of the day for activities.
- ⦿ Establish eye contact before attempting communication.
- ⦿ Help to develop independence, self-esteem, social skills and peer acceptance.
- ⦿ Encourage the child to cope with Epilepsy and allow active participation in all activities (in accordance with parental and medical advice).
- ⦿ Be confident with the first aid treatment for seizures and keep accurate records of seizures seen (including duration of seizure).
- ⦿ Ensure that the child in your care takes his/her medication at the specified times. People with Epilepsy usually take drugs which are called anti-convulsants and that keep the Epilepsy under control.

For further information and advice, contact CHILD Australia.

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