

What Should I Know About Seizures and Epilepsy?

What is a seizure? What is epilepsy?

Seizure (SEE-zhure) is a word for body movements you can't control. Seizures are caused by nerves in the brain not working right.

Epilepsy (EP-il-ep-see) is when people have seizures over and over. Epilepsy is sometimes called seizure disorder.

What causes epilepsy?

Most of the time we don't know. Sometimes it is caused by damage to the brain. Sometimes it runs in families.

Who gets epilepsy?

Many people have it. Epilepsy occurs in one out of every 100 people.

What is a seizure like?

There are many kinds of seizures. Most people with epilepsy have more than one kind.

The most common kind is when a person blacks out, falls down, and has jerky body movements. A person may wet their pants. After the seizure ends, the person goes into a deep sleep or may be drowsy and confused. He or she does not remember the seizure or what happened right before it.

In other kinds of seizures, the person may or may not black out.

How does the doctor check for epilepsy?

Sometimes a doctor can learn whether you have epilepsy just by talking to you. Other times, the doctor will have you get an EEG, which checks brain waves. Other tests, like blood tests and brain scans, are also used.

How is epilepsy treated?

Usually it is treated with medicine. The kind of medicine depends on what kind of seizures you have and how often you have them. It also depends on your age and if you have other health problems.

Do the medicines always control the seizures?

Usually, but not always. For every 10 people with epilepsy, the medicines will prevent seizures in seven of them.

Do the medicines have side effects?

Yes, sometimes. They might make you feel tired or dizzy. You may feel slightly uncoordinated. You may have trouble thinking. You may also have vision problems.



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What can my doctor do if medicines do not work for me?

If medicines do not work, there are other treatments. For some people, brain surgery can stop seizures. There are special diets that sometimes help. There are also little machines called nerve stimulators that may help. They are the size of a large coin. They can be put under your skin and connected to a nerve.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

The Epilepsy Foundation of America
<http://www.efa.org>

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Notes:

This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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