

Understanding Seizures and Epilepsy

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Q What is a seizure and what is epilepsy?

A A seizure is an abnormal movement or behavior caused by unusual electrical activity in the brain. In contrast, epilepsy is a group of related disorders characterized by a tendency for recurrent seizures. Although seizures are a symptom of epilepsy, not all people who appear to have seizures have epilepsy.

Non-epileptic seizures (called pseudoseizures) are not accompanied by unusual electrical activity in the brain and are most often caused by emotional stress or other psychological factors. This type of seizure can be successfully treated through counseling.

Provoked seizures are single seizures that may occur as the result of trauma, low blood sugar (hypoglycemia), low blood sodium, high fever or alcohol or drug abuse. Fever-related (or febrile) seizures may occur during infancy and children usually outgrow them by age 6. After a careful evaluation to estimate the risk of recurrence, patients who suffer a single seizure may not need treatment.

Seizure disorder is a general term used to describe any condition in which seizures may be a symptom. In fact, seizure disorder is so general that it is not a useful term. Unfortunately, "seizure disorder" is often used to avoid the term epilepsy.

Q Who is affected by epilepsy?

A Epilepsy is a relatively common condition, affecting 0.5% to 1% of the population. In the United States, about 2.5 million people have epilepsy. In fact, about 9% of Americans will have at least one seizure during their lives.

Q What causes epilepsy?

A Epilepsy occurs as a result of abnormal electrical activity originating from the brain. Brain cells communicate by sending electrical signals in an orderly pattern. In epilepsy, these electrical signals become abnormal, giving rise to an "electrical storm" that produces seizures.

Types of epilepsy

Patients with epilepsy experience more than one seizure type. This is because seizures are only symptoms. Therefore, it is essential that your neurologist diagnose your type of EPILEPSY, not just the type(s) of SEIZURE you are having.

Q How is epilepsy treated?

A The majority of epileptic seizures are controlled through drug therapy, particularly anticonvulsant drugs.

However, surgery and even diet is also sometimes used to help control seizures. The type of treatment prescribed will depend on several factors including the frequency and severity of the seizures as well as the person's age,

overall health and medical history.

An accurate diagnosis of the type of epilepsy (not just the type of seizure, since most seizure types occur in different types of epilepsy) is also critical to choosing the best treatment.

Coping With Epilepsy

Educational, social and psychological treatment are all part of the total treatment plan. The most important step you can take is to seek help as soon as you feel less able to cope. If you have a problem with school, work or daily activities, it is important for you to discuss it with a member of the epilepsy team. Taking action early will enable you to understand and deal with the many effects of epilepsy. Learning to manage stress will help you maintain a positive physical, emotional and spiritual outlook on life. There are specialists on the team who can help you including social workers, financial counselors and many others.

For a complete guide to epilepsy for your patient please visit [WebMD Health](#)

Edited by Cynthia Haines, MD, WebMD, September 2005.

Reviewed by the Cleveland Clinic Neuroscience Center

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