

## Epilepsy

**What is epilepsy?** Epilepsy is a brain disorder that causes recurring seizures. An abnormal area in your brain sometimes sends bursts of electrical activity that cause your seizures. A birth defect, tumor, stroke, dementia, injury, or infection may cause epilepsy. The cause of your epilepsy may not be known. If your seizures are not controlled, epilepsy may become life-threatening.

**What are the signs and symptoms of an epileptic seizure?** An epileptic seizure usually lasts a few seconds to a few minutes. Your signs and symptoms will depend on which area of your brain is affected. You may experience any of the following:

- Uncontrolled jerking of an arm or leg
- Head or eyes turn to one side of your body
- Tingling along one side of your body
- Flashing lights on one side of your field of vision
- Feelings of fear or that you have already experienced the moment
- Intense memory flashbacks
- Unpleasant taste or smell
- Behavioral changes, such as staring, confusion, or repeating an action over and over

**How is epilepsy diagnosed?** Your caregiver will ask about your health conditions and what medicines you take. Tell him when your seizures occurred and how often. Your caregiver will need a detailed description of your seizure. If possible, bring someone who has seen your seizure with you to your visit. You may need any of the following:

- **An Electroencephalogram (EEG)** records the electrical activity of your brain. It is used to find changes in the normal patterns of your brain activity.
- **A CT scan or an MRI** takes pictures of your brain to check for abnormal areas.

**How is epilepsy treated?** The goal of treatment is to try to stop your seizures completely. You may need any of the following:

- **Medicines** will help control your seizures. You may need medicine daily to prevent seizures or during a seizure to stop it. Do not stop taking your medicine unless directed by your caregiver.
- **Surgery** may help reduce how often you have seizures if medicine does not help. Ask your caregiver for more information about surgery for epilepsy.

**What are the risks of epilepsy?** After a seizure you may feel confused or have a headache. The recovery phase can last minutes or up to 2 weeks. Epilepsy may increase your risk for depression and anxiety. Fear of seizures may affect your independence, such as driving, employment, and social relationships. Seizures can cause serious injury or sudden death.

**What do I need to know about epilepsy?**

- **Take your medicine every day at the same time** to prevent seizures.
- **Keep a seizure diary** to help you find your triggers and avoid them. Write down the dates of your seizures, where you were, and what you were doing. Include how you felt before and

after. Possible triggers include illness, lack of sleep, hormonal changes, alcohol, drugs, lights, or stress.

- **Create a care plan.** Tell family, friends, and coworkers about your epilepsy. Give them instructions that describe how they can keep you safe if you have a seizure.
- **Find support.** You may be referred to a psychologist or social worker. Ask your caregiver about support groups for people with epilepsy.
- **Wear a medical alert bracelet** or carry a card that says you have epilepsy.



**How can others keep me safe if I have an epileptic seizure?** Give the following instructions to family, friends, and coworkers:

- **Do not** hold me down or put anything in my mouth.
- Protect me from injury. Remove sharp or hard objects from the area surrounding me or cushion my head.
- Time how long my seizure lasts. Call medical help if my seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes or if I have a second seizure.
- Stay with me until my seizure ends. Let me rest until I am fully awake.
- **Do not** give me anything to eat or drink until I am fully awake.



**When should I contact my caregiver?**

- You feel you are not able to cope with your diagnosis.
- Your seizures happen more often.
- After your seizures you are confused longer than you usually are.
- You are planning to get pregnant or are currently pregnant.
- You have questions or concerns about your condition or care.

**When should I seek care immediately?**

- Your seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes.
- You have trouble breathing.
- You have a second seizure that happens within 24 hours of your first.
- You are injured during a seizure.

**Reference:** Micromedex's Care Note Series Online