



## **What does a seizure typically look like?**

Generally, epileptic seizures cause loss of consciousness, with a blank stare, a sudden fall, jerking in one or several extremities, and unusual sounds including grunting, loud breathing or crying out. Sometimes the person having a seizure can briefly stop breathing, causing a bluish or reddish skin color. In some cases, the person might bite the side of their tongue, lose control of saliva, urine or bowel movements. More subtle signs of seizures might include turning the head or eyes to one side or upward, blinking or chewing movements, or prolonged confusion.

## **What should I do if I see someone having a seizure?**

If you witness a seizure, you should try to ease the person to the floor, make sure they are not hitting any sharp or dangerous objects, loosen tight clothing at the neck, and try to turn them gently on one side if possible. Do not try to restrain the person or put anything in their mouth. Breathing will normally resume after a minute or two if it stops. Stay near the person and speak reassuringly to them as they regain consciousness. As they are coming back to consciousness block their access to any hazardous areas, but try not to physically restrain them or touch them.

## **When should I call 911?**

- If the seizure activity is lasting more than 5 minutes.
- If the person is not known to have seizures in the past, and this may be the first episode.
- If the person is a diabetic or is pregnant
- If the seizure is repeated without normal consciousness being regained
- If there is any trouble breathing after the seizure ends
- If the person has been injured
- If the person does not seem to be starting to regain usual consciousness within 5-10 minutes

## **What are some tips for special circumstances?**

- **In water:** If a person has a seizure while in water, they should be supported with their head above water with the head tilted back if possible. Whether or not this person seems to fully recover, they should go to an emergency department for evaluation.
- **On a plane:** If passengers can be moved, it is usually a good idea to move anyone next to the person having a seizure so they can lie across a few seats until they regain consciousness. Once consciousness has been regained, they may recline supported by pillows and blankets.
- **On public transportation:** Try to lie the person across two seats if possible, shield them from trauma, and make sure they are not obstructing an entry or likely to fall from the vehicle. If the person recovers fully, there is no reason why they cannot stay on the transportation to their destination.

## **What are some tips for patients with seizures?**

- **Talking to the family/coworkers:** It is often prudent to confide in family or coworkers that a seizure might occur and to prepare them for the best course of action. In a job situation, telling one person, perhaps the supervisor, what might occur can be helpful. It will limit unneeded trips to the ED, and possibly facilitate accommodations if they are needed. At home, it is often useful to consider a drill to practice calling 911 with children, if need be, and to alert families to the likelihood that this event will pass quickly. Obtaining a medical alert bracelet or necklace can help others recognize a known problem.
- **Making adjustments around the house:** Consider taking simple steps to increase safety like avoiding baths and taking showers, using the microwave instead of the stovetop when possible, and using plastic containers instead of glass. It is wise to cook most often while someone else is in the house when possible, and to use the back burners of a stove more than the front ones. Think about whether you would like to have a padded dining room chair with arms. Use thick carpeting and pad sharp edges. In the bathroom, it might be a good idea to hang doors facing outward, and not to

have a habit of locking the door. You might also want to set the water temperature relatively low, and avoid using electrical appliances near water. Tub seats or hand-held water nozzles can also be helpful if seizures are frequent.

### **What are some tips for parents of a child with a seizure disorder?**

- Like other parents, make sure the house is well child-proofed.
- If you are nursing or feeding a baby, try to do so while sitting on the floor or while the baby is in an infant seat.
- Bathe the baby with another person present, or with washcloths or hand held nozzles rather than in the bathtub.
- Use a stroller in the house if you have concerns about sudden falls.
- Make sure your seizure medicines are kept safely away from children.
- When walking outdoors, consider a bungee cord arm bracelet between you and your child if you are alone.
- In general, it is a good idea to explain your illness to your children in a way that will not frighten them.
- Consider automatically programming a button on your phone to call 911 or page a trusted family member, friend or neighbor for them.
- Above all, find ways to enjoy your family time that put you and your family at ease.

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