

Seizures

Seizures are sudden, uncontrolled changes in brain activity. They are a sign that there is a problem in the brain. Most seizures cause a loss of awareness and shaking of the body. Sometimes, they cause staring spells. Most seizures last less than a few minutes and the person may be confused after the seizure. A person who has repeated seizures may have a disease called epilepsy.

Causes of Seizures

It is not always known why a person has seizures. Causes may include:

- Epilepsy
- Brain injury or tumors
- Infections
- Alcohol or drug use
- Low sodium or blood sugar levels
- Kidney or liver failure
- Alzheimer's disease
- Lack of oxygen during birth or a medical condition present at birth

Signs of Seizures

Some people feel a warning sign before the seizure called an aura. This may be a headache, changes in vision, hearing noises, or smelling a scent such as smoke.

During a seizure there may be:

- Uncontrollable body motions such as body stiffening, jerking or facial muscle movements
- Staring spells
- Problems breathing

- Drooling
- Loss of bowel or bladder control
- Loss of consciousness, loss of memory or confusion

Call 911 right away if the person has never had a seizure before or if the seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes.

Try to write down what happens during the seizure. Include the date, time, how long it lasted, and signs such as body motions.

The person may be very tired and confused after the seizure.

Treatment

Treatment is based on the cause of the seizure:

- If this is the first time the person has had a seizure, the doctor will ask about signs and check to see if there is a medical condition that caused it. Blood tests and other tests such as computerized tomography (CT) scan, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), electroencephalogram (EEG) or lumbar puncture may be done.
- A seizure caused by a high fever or a certain medicine is treated by removing the cause.
- For a person with epilepsy, a seizure may be a sign that his or her medicine may need changed.

Most seizures can be managed with medicine. If medicine does not decrease the person's seizures, surgery may be an option.

Safety Concerns

- A person with epilepsy should always wear a medical alert necklace or bracelet.
- Some people need to wear helmets to prevent head injuries.
- If the person has uncontrolled seizures, he or she cannot drive. A person with controlled seizures may be able to get a restricted license to drive under certain conditions. Talk to the doctor for more information.

- A person with uncontrolled seizures should avoid activities where a seizure could cause serious injury. Examples include climbing, biking and swimming alone.

Talk to the doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns or for information about support groups.

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