



Seizures

A **seizure** is a sudden “episode” caused by an electrical problem in the brain. With a seizure, a person has change in awareness, body movements, or sensation.

Signs & Symptoms

There are many types of seizures. Common types are:

- **A Generalized Tonic Clonic Seizure.** This is also called a **grand mal seizure**. A **convulsion** occurs with this type. Signs of a convulsion include:
 - Brief loss of consciousness. Falling down.
 - The arms and legs stiffen, jerk, and twitch.
 - This type usually lasts 1 to 2 minutes. When it ends, the person’s muscles relax. He or she may lose bladder control, be confused, have a headache, and fall asleep. This is the type most people think of with the word “seizure.”
- **An Absence Seizure.** This is also called a **petit mal seizure**. A convulsion does not occur with this type. Signs of an absence seizure include:
 - Blank stares. It looks like the person is daydreaming or not paying attention.
 - Lip smacking. Repeated blinking, chewing or hand movements.
 - This type of seizure usually lasts only a few seconds, but can occur many times a day. When the seizure ends, the person is not confused, but is not aware that the seizure occurred.
 - Absence seizures are common in children and can result in learning problems.

- **A Fever (Febrile) Seizure.** This type is brought on by a high fever in infants and small children. High fevers cause most seizures in children aged 6 months to 5 years. Signs are ones of a convulsion listed in the left column. Most febrile seizures last 1 to 2 minutes, but can last longer. Seeing a child have a febrile seizure causes alarm. In general, these seizures are harmless.

Causes

Causes include **epilepsy** (a brain disorder), infections that cause a high fever, heat stroke, and electric shock. Head injury, stroke, and toxic substances can also cause a seizure. Sometimes the cause of a seizure is not known.

Treatment

Seizure disorders are treated with medication. Other medical treatments may be needed.

Questions to Ask

Did the seizure occur with or after any of the following?

- The person stopped breathing. **{Note:}** Give **Rescue Breaths**. See at www.HealthyLearn.com.)
- A head or other serious injury. **{Note:}** See **Head / Neck / Spine Injuries** at www.HealthyLearn.com.)
- **Signs and symptoms of a heat stroke.** (See at www.HealthyLearn.com.)
- **Electric shock.** (See at www.HealthyLearn.com.)
- **Poisoning.** (See at www.HealthyLearn.com.)
- **Symptoms of meningitis.** (See at www.HealthyLearn.com.)
- An illness with symptoms of lethargy and confusion, flu, or chicken pox.



NO

Flowchart continued on next page



Febrile Seizure Prevention

For a child who has had a febrile seizure in the past, give acetaminophen or ibuprofen at the first sign of a fever. Give the right kind and dose for his or her weight. Insert suppositories that lower fevers, instead, if prescribed by the child's doctor.

{**Note:** Don't give aspirin to anyone less than 19 years old.}

- Dress the child in light, loose clothes.
- Apply washcloths rinsed in lukewarm (not cold) water to your child's forehead and neck. Sponge the child's arms, legs, and trunk with lukewarm water. **Don't use cold water, ice, or rubbing alcohol.**
- Keep trying to bring the fever down until it is 101°F or less.



Get more information from:

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS)
www.ninds.nih.gov

Seizures, Continued

Are any of these conditions present?

- This is the first time the person had a seizure or the seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes.
- The person has a second seizure soon after the first one or has multiple seizures.
- The person has a hard time breathing.
- The person who had the seizure is pregnant or has diabetes.
- The seizure is different from the typical seizure the person has. (It may take longer to wake up after the seizure ends.)



NO

Has the person stopped taking medicines for seizures? Or, do seizures occur more often or are they more severe?



NO



Self-Care / First Aid

For Seizures with Convulsions

- Stay calm. Protect the person from injury. Cushion the head with a pillow, a coat, etc. Move sharp objects out of the way.
- Loosen tight clothes, especially around the neck.
- If the person vomits, clear the mouth of it.
- Do not hold the person down or throw water on the face. Don't put anything into the mouth. (A spoon in the mouth does not prevent tongue biting.)
- If the seizure in a child is due to a fever, start bringing the child's temperature down as soon as the seizure stops. Sponge the child's body with room temperature water. Do not put the child in a bathtub. Do not use ice. Do not use rubbing alcohol.
- Report how long the seizure lasts and the symptoms that occur.
- After the seizure, lay the person on his or her side. Let the person sleep. Check for a medical alert tag. Respond as needed. Do not embarrass the person.
- **Call 9-1-1** (except for a febrile seizure or a seizure in a person you know has a seizure disorder).