

Learning About Epilepsy



What is epilepsy?

Epilepsy is a common condition that causes repeated seizures. Seizures may cause problems with muscle control, movement, speech, vision, or awareness. They usually don't last very long, but they can be scary. Treatment usually works to control and reduce seizures.

What causes it?

Many things can cause epilepsy. It may develop as a result of a head injury or a condition that causes damage to the brain, like a tumor or stroke. Genes may also play a role. But you don't have to have a family history to develop it. Often doctors don't know what causes epilepsy.

What are the symptoms?

The main symptom of epilepsy is repeated seizures that happen without warning. There are different kinds of seizures. You may notice strange smells or sounds. You may lose control of your muscles. Or your body may twitch or jerk. Your symptoms will depend on the type of seizure you have.

How is it diagnosed?

Diagnosing epilepsy can be hard. Your doctor will ask questions to find out what happened just before, during, and right after a seizure. Your doctor will examine you. You'll have some tests, such as an electroencephalogram. This information can help your doctor decide what kind of seizures you have and if you have epilepsy.

How is it treated?

You can take medicines to control and reduce seizures. Which type you use depends on the type of seizure.

You and your doctor will need to find the right combination, schedule, and dose of medicine. If medicine alone doesn't help, your doctor may suggest a special diet or surgery to help reduce seizures.

How can you care for yourself at home?

To help control your seizures, follow your treatment plan. If you take medicine to control seizures, take it exactly as prescribed.

The medicine works best if you take the right amount on the schedule your doctor sets up. Following this schedule keeps the right level of medicine in your body. Even missing just a few doses can allow seizures to happen.

You might be on a special ketogenic diet. If so, follow the diet carefully.

As you follow your treatment plan, also try to figure out and avoid things that may make you more likely to have a seizure. These may include:

- Not getting enough sleep.
- Using drugs or alcohol.
- Being stressed.
- Skipping meals.

If you keep having seizures despite treatment, keep a record of them. Note the date, time of day, and any details about the seizure that you can remember. Your doctor can use this information to plan or adjust your medicine or other treatment. The record can also help your doctor find out what kinds of seizures you are having.

If you have epilepsy:

- Be sure that any doctor who treats you knows that you have epilepsy. And let the doctor know what medicines you take, if any.
- Wear a medical ID bracelet. If you have a seizure or accident that leaves you unconscious or unable to speak for yourself, the bracelet will let those who are treating you know that you have epilepsy. It will also list any medicines you take to control your seizures. That way, you won't be given any medicines that will react badly with those already in your body.
- Ask your doctor if it's safe for you to do things like drive or swim.
- Create a seizure first-aid plan with your friends and family. The plan will help them know how to help you. The kind of plan you need can depend on the kind of seizures you have. Your doctor can tell you more about this.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

Where can you learn more?

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