



5-minute safety talk

Seizures

A seizure is a sudden change in behavior due to excessive electrical activity in the brain.

The symptoms of seizures vary, depending on what parts of the brain are affected. One type of seizure causes loss of consciousness with twitching or shaking of the body. However, some seizures consist of staring spells that can easily go unnoticed and other seizures consist of out-of-control movements or speech. Occasionally, seizures can cause temporary abnormal sensations or visual disturbances.

Seizures can generally be classified as either "simple" (no change in level of consciousness) or "complex" (change in level of consciousness). Seizures may also be classified as generalized (whole body affected) or focal (only one part or side of the body is affected).

Epilepsy is a chronic disorder with recurrent seizures. While some types of epilepsy are hereditary, no cause is apparent in 70% of new cases.

Causes

Any condition that results in abnormal electrical excitation of the brain may result in a seizure, including:

- Epilepsy
- Injury or trauma to the head
- Infection (brain abscess, meningitis)
- Brain tumor
- Stroke

Also, any medical condition that irritates brain cells may result in a seizure. Common medical conditions that commonly cause seizures include:

- Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar)
- Drug use (especially cocaine or stimulants)
- Alcohol withdrawal
- Very high fever (fever convulsions in children)
- Electric shock

Care

Most seizures stop by themselves. However, a person having a seizure may be injured. When a seizure occurs, the main goal is to protect the person from injury.

1. Try to prevent a fall. Lay the person on the ground in a safe area. Clear the area of furniture or other sharp objects.
2. Cushion the person's head by putting something flat and soft under it.
3. Loosen tight clothing, especially around the person's neck, and remove eyeglasses.
4. Turn the person on his or her side if vomiting occurs. This helps make sure that the vomit is not inhaled into the lungs.
5. Look for a medical ID bracelet with seizure instructions.
6. Stay with the person and be reassuring as the person regains consciousness.

- Do not restrain the person.
- Do not place anything between the person's teeth during a seizure (including your fingers).
- Do not move the person unless he or she is in danger or near something hazardous.
- Do not try to make the person stop convulsing. He or she has no control over the seizure and is not aware of what is happening at the time.
- Do not give the person anything by mouth until the convulsions have stopped and the person is fully awake and alert.

In an infant or child, if the seizure occurs with a high fever, cool the child gradually with tepid water. You can give the child acetaminophen, especially if the child has had fever convulsions before. Do not immerse the child in a cold bath.

After a convulsion, most people go into a deep sleep. Don't prevent the person from sleeping. He or she will probably be disoriented, or possibly agitated for awhile after awakening.

When to contact a medical professional

Call 9-1-1 if:

- This is the first time the person has had a seizure.
- A seizure lasts more than 5 minutes.
- The person does not awaken or have normal behavior after a seizure.
- Another seizure starts soon after a seizure ends.
- The person had a seizure in water.
- The person is pregnant, injured, or has diabetes.
- The person does not have a medical ID bracelet (instructions explaining what to do).
- There is anything different about this seizure compared to the person's usual seizures.

Report all seizures (even a mild one) to the health care provider. If the person is known to have epilepsy or recurrent seizures, their doctor should be notified so that medications can be adjusted or other instructions given.

Prevention

There is no specific way to prevent seizures. Use helmets when appropriate to prevent head injury. This will lessen the likelihood of a brain injury and subsequent seizures. Avoid recreational drugs. Keep fevers under control, especially in children. People with epilepsy should wear a medical alert tag, take medication as directed, and avoid excessive amounts of alcohol.

Visit [nsc.org/members](https://www.nsc.org/members) for more safety tips

