



## HEALTH INFORMATION

# Epilepsy

## What is epilepsy?

Epilepsy is a neurological condition - which means it affects the brain. It is also a physical condition, because the body is affected when someone has a seizure. Epilepsy is described as the tendency to have repeated seizures that start in the brain. Epilepsy is usually only diagnosed after the person has had more than one seizure. Anyone can have a seizure if the circumstances are right, but most people do not have seizures under 'normal conditions'.

Seizures are sometimes called 'fits' or 'attacks'. Seizures happen when there is a sudden interruption in the way the brain normally works. Epilepsy is a variable condition that affects different people in different ways. There are many different types of seizures (over 40). What seizures look like can vary. For example someone may go 'blank' for a couple of seconds, they may wander around and be quite confused, or they may fall to the ground and some people are not aware during their seizures and so they do not remember what happens to them. It can be really useful to have a description of what happened from someone who saw their seizure to help with diagnosis. This is sometimes called an 'eyewitness account'.

There are many different reasons (causes) why someone might develop epilepsy. Sometimes a cause for epilepsy can be found (for example if someone has had a head injury) but sometimes the person's epilepsy starts 'out of the blue' and the cause cannot be found.

Epilepsy can start at any age, and it is often diagnosed in people under 18 and people over 65. This is because some causes are more common in young people (such as difficulties at their birth, childhood infections or accidents) and in older people (such as strokes that lead to epilepsy). For some people their epilepsy might 'go away' and they stop having seizures. This is called spontaneous remission.

- Epilepsy can be difficult to diagnose and there are a number of different tests that might be done to help with diagnosis such as an EEG (electroencephalogram) or an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging).
- Epilepsy is usually treated with medication. These drugs aim to stop seizures from happening, but they do not cure epilepsy. With the right drugs, up to 70% of people with epilepsy could have their seizures controlled (stopped)

## What you can do

- Stay calm and reassure them quietly.
- Try to protect their dignity – ask spectators to move away.
- Keep them safe - if it is a mild seizure they may appear vacant and do odd things and not remember what they did.
- If they fall to the floor – note the time the fit started: keep them safe, don't move them unless they are in danger
  - move objects away from them if possible. Try to protect their head with something soft. When they wake, reassure them and when they are able, help them to a private place. Some people will be very sleepy and need to sleep, while some may be fine. If the fit appears to go on – call the ambulance for advice.

## For more information

[www.epilepsysociety.org.uk](http://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk)  
[www.epilepsy.org.uk](http://www.epilepsy.org.uk)

[www.medigold-health.com](http://www.medigold-health.com)

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