

What Is Epilepsy / Seizure Disorder?

Epilepsy (or seizure disorder) is a health condition that causes repeated seizures, which are sudden changes in how the brain works. There are many different types of seizures. Some can make a person's body jerk for a few minutes, while others cause brief staring or a short loss of attention.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

How common is epilepsy?

Very few children have epilepsy. It's more likely to happen in children who have family members with the condition, a brain injury, or a genetic condition where seizures are common.

What should I do if I suspect my child is having a seizure?

If you think your child is having a seizure and it lasts more than 5 minutes, call 911 or take them to the emergency department. If the seizure lasts less than 5 minutes, contact a medical provider right away. During a seizure, lay your child on their side in a safe area. Do not put anything in their mouth.

What kind of help is there for epilepsy?

There are many effective treatments for epilepsy. Most children with seizures lead normal, happy lives. Common treatments include:

- **Medicine:** Daily medication can help prevent seizures.
- **Testing:** Tests such as an EEG (electroencephalogram), which measures electrical activity in the brain, can help doctors understand what's happening.
- **Medical devices:** Some people use devices to help prevent or reduce seizures.

What other conditions sometimes occur with epilepsy?

Sometimes, people with epilepsy have other conditions like brain or nerve problems, genetic conditions, or mental health challenges. Be open with medical providers about all symptoms.

Talking with a Medical Provider

When talking with medical providers or specialists, you might want to:

- Bring notes! Document what you and others have observed such as how often the seizures happen, what they look like, and events leading up to the seizure. Share videos if you have them.
- Ask about what testing your child might need or if you should see a brain specialist (neurologist).

- Discuss what treatments might be helpful.

What You Can Do at Home

Getting help can take time, and there are often waitlists. While waiting for your appointment, it may help to:

- **Keep a record:** Write down when seizures occur, any patterns you notice, and how long each event lasts.
- **Wear a bracelet:** Have your child wear a medical alert bracelet that says they have epilepsy.
- **Get good sleep:** Being tired can trigger seizures; make sure your child is sleeping enough.
- **Communicate with the school and others:** Inform people who spend time with your child about their condition and create a seizure safety plan. It's important that those close to your child are trained in first aid practices relating to seizures.

Learning about epilepsy and getting help is a journey. You're not alone.

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ACT for Youth: Epilepsy / Seizure Disorders



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About This Series

This series of handouts on health conditions was written by clinicians in Weill Cornell Medicine's Pediatric Mental Health Integration Program, partners in the ACT for Youth CYSHCN Program Center of Excellence at Cornell University.