

EPILEPSY



EPILEPSY is a disorder involving repeated seizures. Although it can be a lifelong illness, most people can manage their seizures with treatment. Talk with your doctor about treatment options.

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Learn About Epilepsy

Epilepsy is a brain disorder. It's also called a seizure disorder because it causes repeated seizures in people who have it.

Brain cells communicate with each other through electrical signals. Seizures occur when some cells send abnormal signals in the brain.

A seizure may be serious. **You may shake uncontrollably as your muscles relax and contract. This is called a convulsion.** Or, you may have a seizure that goes unnoticed by everyone around you because the symptoms are so minor. After a convulsion, you may feel tired or dazed. You may not remember what happened before and during the seizure.

Of the millions of adults who have a seizure, most never have a second seizure. If you have had more than one seizure, your doctor may diagnose you with epilepsy.

What causes epilepsy?

In many patients, epilepsy is linked to something that harmed the brain or deprived it of oxygen. This can be due to an injury or disease, or drug/alcohol abuse. But the cause of epilepsy is unknown in most people. Experts believe that family history can play a role.

There is no single cause of seizures. Anything that disturbs the normal brain pattern of electrical activity can lead to seizures.

In people with epilepsy, seizures can be set off by a variety of things called “triggers.” These triggers vary from person to person.

Some common seizure triggers include:

- Skipped antiseizure medicine
- Illness (such as a cold, infection, or high fever)
- Low or high blood sugar
- Hormonal changes
- Physical or emotional stress
- Lack of sleep
- Flashing bright lights
- Drinking too much alcohol or caffeine
- Non-prescription medicines, medicines for other health conditions, supplements, or herbal remedies
- Use of illegal drugs
- Poor eating habits or certain foods
- Smoking cigarettes

Many people discover their seizure triggers with time. The **Seizure Tracker** on pages 6 and 7 can help you track your seizure patterns and help identify your triggers.

Epilepsy can be a lifelong illness. The good news is that most people can manage their seizures with treatment and by avoiding their personal triggers.



Understand The Types of Seizures

Not all seizures are alike. They differ in how they affect the brain and in their symptoms. Defining the seizure type may be hard. Seizure patterns can change, and some people have more than one type of seizure with no clear pattern.

The different types of seizures are:

Partial seizures begin in one part of the brain. Most people with epilepsy have partial seizures. There are two types:

- **Simple partial seizures** may cause unusual feelings or symptoms that can take many forms. You may feel joy, anger, sadness, or nausea. You may hear, smell, taste, see, or feel things that are not real. You are alert and aware during the seizure.
- **Complex partial seizures**, unlike simple partial seizures, cause you to lose consciousness. You may repeat certain behaviors, like blinks, twitches, mouth movements, or even walking in a circle. Some people throw objects, or hit walls or furniture, as if in anger or fear.

Secondary generalized seizures occur when a partial seizure spreads to the entire brain. They may begin as a complex or simple partial seizure. The seizure then becomes more intense, causing your limbs and body to shake and stiffen. This is called a convulsion and you may lose consciousness.

Generalized seizures affect areas of both sides of the brain, usually with loss of consciousness. There are four main types of generalized seizures:

- **Stiffness, loss of consciousness, and repeated jerking.** You may fall to the ground, bite your tongue, and/or lose bladder control. This type of seizure can cause serious injury, including fractures. These are the most common generalized seizures. Your doctor may call this a **tonic-clonic seizure**.
- **Brief periods of staring, blinking, and/or twitching.** This type of seizure happens mostly in children. The symptoms may be mistaken for daydreaming. Your doctor may call this an **absence seizure**.
- **Your limbs jerk suddenly, often just after waking.** Your doctor may call this a **myoclonic seizure**.
- **Sudden loss of muscle tone.** This type of seizure can literally cause you to drop to the ground. Your doctor may call this an **atonic seizure**.



Use The Seizure Tracker

When you have details on your seizures, triggers, and any treatment side effects, you and your doctor can work to better control your seizures. Use this Seizure Tracker to **write down a month's worth of information**. Make copies so that you can fill it out in future months. Ask your doctor how long you should use the Seizure Tracker.

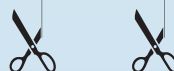
Enter the month in the space below. Number the squares of the calendar with the days of the month. Then use the Seizure and Side Effects Keys at the right to enter information.

Month _____

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

Types of Seizures Key	Treatment Side Effects Key
<p>A) Aura (Simple partial) B) Blackout (Complex partial) C) Convulsion (Tonic-clonic) D) Other _____</p> <p>See pages 4 and 5 for descriptions of the different seizure types.</p>	<p>1) Abnormal coordination 2) Blurred vision 3) Difficulty speaking 4) Dizziness 5) Headache 6) Lack of concentration 7) Memory loss 8) Mood changes 9) Nausea 10) Rash 11) Sleepiness 12) Tremor 13) Weight changes</p> <p>Other side effects:</p> <p>14) _____ 15) _____ 16) _____</p> <p>For female patients only:</p> <p>M On menstrual cycle</p>

Notes _____





Take Antiseizure Medicines As Prescribed

Medicine can help prevent seizures. Many different antiseizure medicines are available. You may find that, by taking a medicine, you have fewer or milder seizures. **You may go months or even years between seizures.**

Sometimes epilepsy can be controlled by one medicine. Or, you may need two or more medicines to better manage seizures.

Antiseizure medicines affect people differently. To lower the risk of side effects, your doctor may switch you to a different medicine, or suggest that you take only one antiseizure medicine.

It may take some time to find the right treatment. Work with your doctor. Of course, you want to find the treatment that best controls your seizures. But you should also discuss finding medicines that you tolerate well.

Use the Seizure Tracker (pages 6 and 7) as a place to record your seizures. It can help you and your doctor see how well your current medicine is managing your seizures.



▼ **Don't skip your medicine. A missed dose of antiseizure medicine may lead to seizures.**

Stay on your treatment

It's natural to want to stop taking medicine once you feel better. But it's very important to **take your antiseizure medicine for as long as your doctor prescribes it.** Never stop taking the medicine without instructions from your doctor. That means you must take your antiseizure medicine even if the seizures are under control.

If you have problems related to your antiseizure medicine, call your doctor. Stopping the medicine without a doctor's advice is one of the main reasons why people who have been seizure-free start having them again. **Seizures triggered by stopping medicine can be very serious.**

Some people are able to stop taking antiseizure medicines after they've gone long periods without a seizure. Doctors will usually advise patients to have several years without seizures before gradually stopping their treatment. People who are less likely to be able to stop treatment are those who:

- Have a family history of epilepsy.
- Take more than one medicine for epilepsy.
- Have partial seizures.
- Continue to have abnormal electroencephalography (EEG) results while on medicine.

The **Treatment Satisfaction Survey** (pages 10 and 11) can help you and your doctor create a treatment plan that's right for you. It asks questions about problems you may have in your daily life, as a result of your epilepsy or your antiseizure medicine.



Fill Out The Treatment Satisfaction Survey

1. Do you feel that your seizures are adequately controlled?

Yes No **Explain:** _____

2. Are you having difficulty thinking clearly (for example, problems concentrating, communicating, or remembering things)?

Yes No **Explain:** _____

3. Are you bothered by changes in your physical appearance (for example, changes in weight, hair loss or unusual hair growth, acne or rash, gum problems)?

Yes No **Explain:** _____

4. Are your feelings or moods out of the ordinary (for example, sadness, anger, nervousness, too much or too little energy)?

Yes No **Explain:** _____

5. Do you find that you have problems with coordination (for example, you feel dizzy or unsteady)?

Yes No **Explain:** _____

6. Do any of the above symptoms you described or other problems you may be experiencing interfere with your daily activities or life goals (for example, your job performance, schoolwork, or your relationships with family or friends)?

Yes No **Explain:** _____

Take your completed survey with you when you meet with your doctor.





Other Treatment Options

There are epilepsy treatments available besides medicine. These are used mainly in people whose seizures aren't well controlled by antiseizure medications.

- **Surgery**—When medicine doesn't help control your seizures, your doctor may suggest that you be evaluated for surgery. Surgery for epilepsy does not always reduce seizures. Also, it can cause changes in personality or brain function.
- **Vagal nerve stimulation**—This treatment uses a device implanted under the skin of the chest—much like a pacemaker. It is attached to the vagus nerve in the lower neck. It delivers short bursts of electrical energy to the brain that may reduce seizures.
- **Ketogenic diet**—Studies have shown that some children have fewer seizures if they eat a high-fat, low-carbohydrate diet. Called the ketogenic diet, it causes the body to break down fats, instead of carbohydrates. This creates a condition called ketosis. Researchers are not sure how ketosis reduces seizures. People who try this strict diet should work closely with a dietitian and their doctor.

If you would like to know more about these treatment options, talk with your doctor. He or she may be able to prescribe a different medicine if your treatment isn't controlling your seizures as well as you'd like, or if you have a problem with side effects.

Take Charge Of Your Seizures

Along with medicine, you may be able to gain even more control over epilepsy with lifestyle changes. Here are some tips:

- **Count out medicine(s) ahead of time.** Separate each dose, so you can tell whether or not you have taken it. Pill boxes with sections for each dose can be helpful.
- **Write out a medicine schedule.** Put it where you can see it every day. Keeping a copy in your purse or wallet can help, too. Some people like to set the alarm on their watches to remind them when to take their medicine. Come up with a system that works for you.
- **Don't skip your antiseizure medicine.** Missed medicine is a major cause of new seizures. Know what to do in advance in case you miss a dose.
- **Take care of yourself.** Many people have triggers that they can avoid through a healthier lifestyle:
 - Eat a healthy diet.
 - If you smoke, try to quit. Ask your doctor for help.
 - Manage stress (for instance, try relaxation techniques like yoga).
 - Get plenty of rest.
 - Don't use illegal drugs and avoid alcohol.



Living With Epilepsy

Getting used to life with a seizure disorder can be a challenge. It can change parts of your career, schoolwork, and relationships. You may feel a loss of self-esteem and confidence. You may feel overwhelmed and anxious that a seizure might occur at any time and feel depressed that you have this condition.

The good news is that, with medicine, **most people with most types of epilepsy can control their seizures.** There's a good chance you can, too. The more you know about your epilepsy and treatment, the better you can take care of yourself. With knowledge and the right treatment plan, people with epilepsy can look forward to full, independent lives.

Epilepsy and outside activities

Baseball, jogging, and many other sports are reasonably safe for people with epilepsy. In fact, **exercise may improve seizure control in some people.** **Check with your doctor.** To reduce your seizure risk, drink plenty of water, get lots of rest, and eat regular meals.

You may be able to drive a car if your seizures are well controlled.

Most states require proof that a person with epilepsy has been seizure-free for a few months to several years. Check the regulations in your state. The Department of Motor Vehicles may require a doctor's letter stating that you meet your state's requirements.

Get the support you need

Family and friends will be there for you, but you may find that you need more support. An epilepsy support group can be a great place to share your hopes and triumphs, as well as questions and concerns.

The Epilepsy Foundation can help you **find a support group that's right for you.** You'll find contact information for support groups on the back page of this booklet.

In most cases, people with epilepsy can work to support themselves and their families. If your seizures are so severe or frequent that you can't work, you may qualify for assistance from a federal program:

- **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)** is for people who have limited savings, income, or possessions.
- **Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)** is for people who have worked for a certain period and paid into Social Security through payroll deductions, or whose parents have contributed. Call your local Social Security office for details, or contact your local Epilepsy Foundation office.

Call 1 (800) 772-1213 for information on SSI and SSDI.



▼ **You may be able to drive if your seizures are controlled. Check with your state's Motor Vehicles department.**



Explore Epilepsy Resources

There are resources to help you live with epilepsy—starting with your doctor. You and your doctor are a team. Work together to find a medicine that you can take with few side effects, whether you're newly diagnosed or you've been on medicine for a while.

Other resources include:

Epilepsy Foundation®

1 (800) 332-1000

www.epilepsyfoundation.org

Epilepsy Help

1 (888) 825-5249

www.epilepsyhelp.com

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