

Factsheet

Epilepsy Awareness

What is Epilepsy?

There are over 600,000 people living in the UK with epilepsy.

A seizure is caused by a sudden burst of intense electrical activity often referred to as epileptic activity which causes a temporary disruption to the way the brain normally works. This results in the brain's messages becoming disordered and inevitably an epileptic seizure occurs.

All functions of our body are of course controlled by our brain. What is experienced during a seizure generally depends on two factors; where in the brain the epileptic activity begins and how widely and rapidly it spreads. As a consequence of this, there are many different types of seizure and each person will experience epilepsy in a way that is unique to them.

Tonic-clonic (convulsive) seizures are the seizures most people think of as epilepsy

However there are many different types of seizure. They are classed by the area in the brain where the epileptic activity originates.

Focal (partial) seizures

In these seizures the epileptic activity starts in a specific area of the brain. Some people remain alert of their surroundings during these types of seizures whilst others are completely unaware of what is happening around them. Uncontrollable movements are often experienced or unusual sensations or feelings. In some cases, bystanders may not be aware that you are even having a seizure. Simple focal seizures (SFS) are commonly described as being difficult to put into words, thus the word 'strange' is often used to attempt to convey the feeling of a seizure as no other word is adequate. This can be incredibly upsetting and/or frustrating for the person experiencing the seizure.

Focal seizures can last from a few seconds to a few minutes. After a complex focal seizure, you may feel confused or disorientated for a while; sometimes called 'post-ictal' (after seizure) confusion and it may be hard to tell when the seizure has ended. In many instances, these types of seizures result in tiredness and the need to rest. It may also be that you will not remember the seizure after it happens. Epileptic activity can start as a focal seizure then spread to the rest of your brain to become a generalised seizure.

Generalised seizures

These seizures involve epileptic activity in both halves (hemispheres) of your brain. Loss of consciousness during this type of seizure is common; however it can also be so brief that it is unnoticeable to those around you.

The muscles in the body may stiffen and/or jerk and you may fall over. A loss of bladder and/or bowel control is also not uncommon. Consciousness often returns after a couple of minutes and jerking movements come to an end.

Factors that can trigger a seizure:

- Lack of sleep.
- Stress.
- Missing a dose of epilepsy medicine.
- Alcohol.
- Missing meals.
- Flashing or flickering lights – this is called photosensitive epilepsy.

What to do when someone has a seizure (Tonic-clonic seizures)

Do...

- Note the time.
- Protect the person from injury.
- Cushion their head.
- Be calm and continuously reassuring.
- Once the seizure has terminated attempt to aid breathing by gently placing them in the recovery position.
- Remain with the person until recovery is complete.
- If the seizure doesn't stop after five minutes call for an ambulance.
- Cover them with a blanket to protect their dignity (in case of bladder/bowel loss).

Don't...

- Restrain the person's movements.
- Attempt to move them unless they are in danger.
- Put anything in the person's mouth.
- Give them anything to eat or drink until they are fully recovered.
- Attempt to bring them round.

Some people appear vacant, wander around or seem confused, not everyone falls to the ground and shakes. Until they recover, stay with them and keep them safe.

SUDEP (Sudden unexpected death in epilepsy)

Around 600 people die each year due to SUDEP.

Sudden unexpected death from epilepsy (or SUDEP) happens when someone dies unexpectedly due to their epilepsy. The reasons as to why SUDEP occurs are not clear or properly understood. It is thought to happen either during or following a seizure. The danger of SUDEP varies widely from person to person, but some of the risks around SUDEP can be minimised.

Where can I find out more information?

www.epilepsysociety.org.uk

www.epilepsy.org.uk

For **carers** and anyone else who has anxieties about family, relationships, personal or financial matters we have our fantastic free confidential **Employee Assistance Programme, Employee Care managed by Capita independently from NHSBT**. You can telephone 0800 716017 to speak to someone and you can access a wealth of information on line. Please visit www.employeeecare.com. To log in all you need to do is type the pin code 72992 into both the access code and password boxes. This is an incredibly valuable benefit to all staff and it's free to you as NHSBT employees!