

You, me and epilepsy

Epilepsy is a disease of the brain. When someone has epilepsy, they will sometimes have seizures.

Seizures happen when the brain sends mixed up messages and the body doesn't work the way it should for a short time. They don't make the person sick. Most of the time, someone who has epilepsy feels just as healthy as everyone else.

Your brain

Your brain controls almost everything that happens to your body. It sends and receives messages to and from your body to make you move, feel, think or react to something. These messages are like little electrical signals.



How seizures happen

Seizures happen in the brain. They can also be called fits or convulsions. All of these words mean the same thing.

Some of the brains electrical signals or messages get mixed-up.

When you have a seizure, for just a few seconds or minutes, the brain cells send mixed-up messages. This stops your body from working properly for a short time. Some things that might happen are:

- your body might shake without you wanting it to
- or you may fall down, go stiff, and shake all over
- or you move around as if you were half asleep
- or things may look, or sound, or feel strange to you - just for a moment
- or it could just make you stop and stare.

When a seizure stops, the brain cells go back to working the right way again. But you may be tired or sore, and feel like sleeping for a while afterwards.

Different types of seizures

There are lots of different kinds of seizures - not everyone has the same kind. It depends on what part of the brain the seizure happens. Your type of seizure or epilepsy may have a specific name which your doctor should tell you.

Some common seizures

The biggest type of seizure you might see is called a **tonic clonic seizure**.

Someone having this seizure will suddenly lose consciousness, or 'black out' then become stiff all over and have jerking movements. When the seizure is over, they may be confused, sore and sleepy.

Another seizure that someone with epilepsy might have is called a **focal seizure**.

Someone having this seizure might be confused or look like they are sleepwalking. They might do strange things or make strange sounds and repeat movements over and over. These seizures can look very different for each person.

A seizure called an **absence seizure** is seen in children with epilepsy.

These seizures are really short and look just like daydreaming. The person will suddenly stop what they are doing and just stare for a few seconds. They don't remember anything that happens during the seizure and will probably not know they even had one. People can have these lots of times a day.

Epilepsy and medicines

The doctor will give you epilepsy medicine to take, which might stop the seizures altogether or help to make them happen less often. Your doctor will tell you how much medicine to take, and how many times a day to take it. Sometimes you might need to try more than one medicine.

It is important to take seizure medicine at the same time every day so it works well.

Sometimes your medicine can make you feel dizzy, tired, upset your stomach, or make you see double, especially when you first start it. If you feel different or bad, tell your parents or doctor and some changes can be made.

Being healthy

If you have epilepsy, it is always good to stay healthy, which means get enough sleep, exercise and eat good food most of the time. Being healthy makes your body stronger and can help keep the seizures away.

You should also enjoy activities like other people. Having seizures doesn't mean you can't do things.

Late nights, not eating properly and getting really upset and worried over things may set off seizures.

Having epilepsy shouldn't change what you do, but sometimes you might need to make some changes to keep safe. You should be able to play sports, and even swim as long as there is someone with you to make sure you are safe in the water.

Friends

Your friends might not know much about epilepsy, but a true friend will be happy to learn about epilepsy and what to do when a seizure happens so they are not afraid and can help you.

You can tell them that epilepsy is...

- **A disease where someone has seizures sometimes**
- **Not contagious**
 - You can't catch epilepsy, it's not infectious and no-one can catch it from you.
- **Not a mental illness**
 - People with epilepsy are not crazy, stupid or mentally ill. Anyone can get epilepsy. Having seizures doesn't mean you are less smart than other people.
- **Not something that happens to only disabled people**
 - Anyone can get epilepsy
- **Does not stop you doing most things you want**
 - Many people have epilepsy and got on with their lives just the same.
- **Able to be treated with medicine** to try and stop the seizures happening.

Also some facts:

- About 400,000 Australians, will develop epilepsy at some time during their lives.
- Most people with epilepsy have their first seizure when they are a child or a teenager.
- Many children grow out of epilepsy.
- It is likely someone you know has epilepsy.



What to do if someone has a seizure?

- Stay calm
- Keep the person safe - move anything away that is sharp or hard that could cause injury.
- Only move the person if they are in danger like on a road or hot concrete. You might need help for this.
- Put something soft under the person's head.
- Do not try to hold the person down.
- Do not put anything in the person's mouth.
- After a seizure, if they are on the ground, roll the person onto their side in the recovery position.
- Stay with the person after the seizure stops. Talk to them.
- Most times you do not need to call an ambulance.

Dial 000 to call an ambulance if:

You are unsure about anything.

- The seizure happens in water.
- The person is injured.
- The seizure lasts longer than five minutes.
- They have another seizure.
- The person cannot breathe properly.
- It is their first seizure ever.

