

# Seizures and Epilepsy

Seizures are sudden, uncontrollable events of the brain. They occur when the brain sends out abnormal electrical signals to the body. There are many reasons why people have seizures. When a child has seizures a lot, they have epilepsy. Often, this health problem can be partly or fully controlled. With the right care, epilepsy won't stop your child from enjoying life.



## Why do people get epilepsy?

Most cases of epilepsy start in childhood. Many children with epilepsy still having seizures as adults. Often, healthcare providers can't tell why a child has epilepsy. Certain things can raise a child's risk for getting epilepsy. These include:

- Head injury
- Brain infection
- Stroke
- Tumors

Seizure disorders like epilepsy may run in families. More people are being diagnosed with genetic causes for epilepsy because of genetic testing.

## What are seizures?

Seizures are caused by problems with the electrical signals in the brain. Common symptoms include:

- Convulsions (muscle jerking) involving either part of the body or the whole body
- Loss of consciousness
- Sudden stiffening of the body
- Loss of bladder control
- Repeat movements, such as chewing, lip smacking, or clapping

- Short periods of memory loss or confusion
- Periods of blank staring or blinking (with loss of awareness)
- Unresponsiveness to questions or instructions

A child may feel sudden fear, anger, or panic before a seizure. They may note changes in the way things look, sound, smell, or feel before the seizure. These are called auras. They are the earliest part of a seizure. After the seizure is over, the child is often weak or confused. Sometimes children will sleep for a long time after a seizure. This is called the postictal period.

## **Diagnosing epilepsy**

A neurologist is a healthcare provider who specializes in the brain and other parts of the nervous system. If your child has seizures, a neurologist will check if a cause can be found. You'll be asked questions about your child's health and the history of the seizures. An EEG (electroencephalogram) is often done. This is a test that records brain activity. Other tests may also be done. Your child may have an MRI or a lumbar puncture (spinal tap). In some cases, the healthcare provider may order genetic testing.

## **Treating epilepsy**

Your child's healthcare provider will talk with you about the best way to control your child's epilepsy. Seizures can often be controlled with medicine. Some medicines are given every day to prevent seizures. Others are prescribed to stop a seizure once it has started. In some cases, it may be hard to control the frequency of your child's seizures. In such cases, healthcare providers may suggest a special diet called the ketogenic diet. There is also a magnetic device that can be put under the skin in your child's chest. This device stimulates the vagus nerve to try to end the seizure. For some children, surgery may be a choice. Many children stop having seizures as they get older. Even those who keep having them can live normal and happy lives.