

What is Epilepsy?

LORRIN

The first thing you should know about Epilepsy is lots of people have it, so you are not alone.

DANIEL

How do you catch this Epil-pepsi?

LORRIN

Epilepsy isn't a cold...or a soft drink. You don't catch it. A person has epilepsy if he or she has seizures more than once. It's a problem in the brain when the brain does something unexpected, sort of like an electrical wiring problem.

DANIEL

But what IS a seizure?

LORRIN

The brain is the the control center of the body.

DANIEL

(We hear a phone ring)

Hello, hand? This is the brain calling to tell you it's time to answer the phone!

LORRIN

Uhhh, that's kind of how the brain works, but it's really more like this...

LORRIN

The brain is made up of these little things called neurons. Neurons talk to each other by sending electrical signals, but the signals have to be working together.

DANIEL

Like traffic lights. Some go red, some yellow, and some green so cars can move smoothly and not crash.

LORRIN

Right. When some of the neurons are out of sync with the others they may cause a seizure. Imagine what would happen if the traffic lights were all out of whack...like they ALL turn green at once.

DANIEL

Yep. Lots of accidents. My brain is telling me to sing! La la la lala lala.

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And my brain is telling me to cover my ears.

LORRIN

Experts divide seizures into partial seizures and generalized seizures. When abnormal or unusual electrical activity happen in one part of the brain it's called a partial seizure.

DANIEL

That's like traffic lights being out in one part of the city.

LORIN

A partial seizure may cause a hand or leg to have jerky movements but the person is awake and can talk with you! When you see this it is best to leave the person alone and keep a careful eye on them. The seizure usually only lasts for a couple of minutes. But, when all the neurons start misfiring at once, it's called a Generalized seizure.

DANIEL

That's like when traffic lights go out all over the city!

LORRIN

Right. When this happens a person can fall and their whole body starts jerking. A person may even make sounds. But they are not in pain. They are not awake but the seizures usually last only a few minutes. When this happens it's good to do these things:

LORRIN

1. Put something soft under their head and neck so they don't hurt themselves.
2. Don't try to hold them down since it could hurt them ...and you!
3. Never, ever try to put ANYTHING in their mouth. NEVER!
4. Try to turn the person on their side to help them breath.
5. Move anything away that may hurt them, like sharp objects or furniture.
6. When they stop, don't try to move them. Usually they will be very tired and sleep.

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DANIEL

That sounds really scary.

LORRIN

It does, but there is good news! There is medicine you can take to help prevent seizures. Which medicine you take depends on the type of seizure. It's really important to take your medicine. There is no reason to be afraid! Remember many, many kids have epilepsy. If you take your medicine the way you're supposed to, you can usually do all the fun stuff you always did.