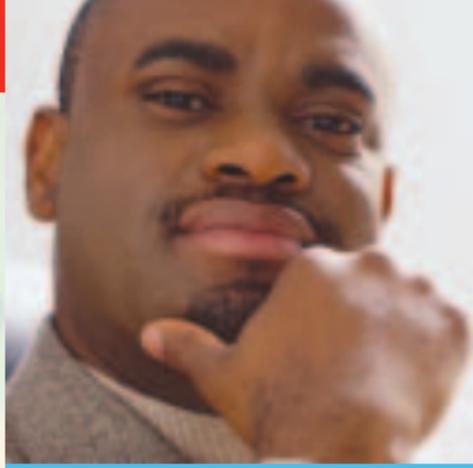


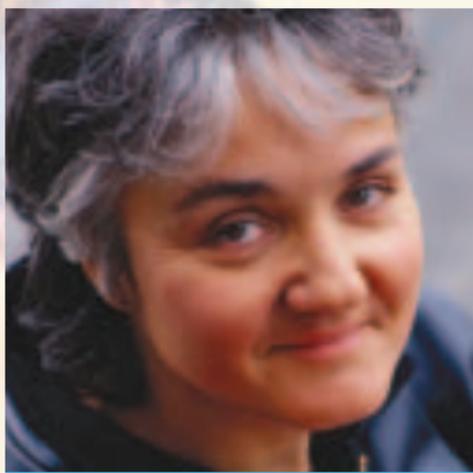
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# Seizures & First Aid



Information  
to help  
you help



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EPILEPSY FOUNDATION®



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This booklet gives you some basic information about epilepsy. It's not medical advice. Don't change any treatment or activities without first talking to a doctor.

## WHAT IS EPILEPSY?

Epilepsy (also called a seizure disorder) is a medical condition that affects many people. It is a disorder of the brain.

When electrical signals in the brain misfire, they can cause seizures. Seizures may change a person's awareness, movements, or sensations.

More than two and a half million Americans of all ages live with epilepsy.

Many still have seizures, even though they take medicine to prevent them.

When people have seizures, they rely on others to look after them during the seizure.

They rely on people like you to do the right thing and keep them safe.

That's what this pamphlet is all about.

## ABOUT SEIZURES

There are several kinds of seizures and they all look different. They need different kinds of first aid, too.

The kind of seizure that most people have heard of makes a person

fall, get stiff, and then shake for a short time.

Breathing may be faint, and even stop briefly. After a minute or two, the shaking and jerking slows down and stops. Breathing starts again and slowly gets back to normal.

This kind of seizure may be called different names – a convulsive seizure, a grand mal seizure, or the one the doctors use, a generalized tonic clonic seizure.

## FIRST AID TIP

- Explain to others what's happening.

## FIRST AID STEPS

Here's what you do when someone has this kind of seizure:

- Keep the person from getting hurt while the shaking or jerking continues.
- Put something flat and soft under his head; loosen anything tight around his neck.
- Turn him on one side so he won't choke.

- Look for any ID that says “epilepsy” or “seizure disorder.”
- Keep track of the time.
- As the jerking slows down, make sure he’s breathing normally.
- Talk calmly and help him get fully awake.

Here’s what you **don’t** do:

- Don’t put *anything* in his mouth.
- Don’t hold him down or restrain his movements.
- Don’t try to give him medicine or anything to drink until he’s fully awake and aware.

### FIRST AID TIP

- Remember seizures usually last only a couple of minutes.

If you know someone with epilepsy who has a vagus nerve stimulation (VNS) implant, ask him or her if there’s any special action you should take if a seizure happens.

Your friend may ask you to move a special magnet over the site of the implant, and show you how to do it.

## SHOULD YOU CALL 911?

Yes, you should call 911 if you have no way of knowing whether the person has epilepsy.

If someone who doesn't have epilepsy has this kind of seizure, it could be a sign of serious illness.

You should call 911 if the person having the seizure is pregnant, has diabetes, is injured in some way, or appears to be ill.

You should also call, if

- The seizure goes on longer than five minutes, or
- Another seizure starts right after the first one ends, or
- The person has trouble breathing, seems hurt or in pain, or
- The person isn't getting back to normal the way he usually does.

### FIRST AID TIP

- Don't put anything in the person's mouth during a seizure.

You needn't call 911 if

- The seizure ends after a couple of minutes, and
- The person wakes up and starts breathing normally again, and
- Is fully awake and aware after a short rest.

## ANOTHER KIND OF SEIZURE

Another kind of seizure that many people with epilepsy have is quite different – and it needs a different kind of first aid.

This kind of seizure makes people lose touch with their surroundings. For a few minutes they won't know where they are or what they're doing.

They seem to be in a daze. They can't talk with you or follow instructions.

They may look as if they are chewing. They may pick at clothes, or try to take them off.

They may mumble. Or wander. Or do the same thing over and over. They may seem afraid, or upset.

This seizure is called a complex partial seizure.

## FIRST AID TIP

- Don't restrain movements.

## FIRST AID STEPS

Here's what you do if you see someone having this type of seizure

- Stay calm.
- Don't shout or grab hold.
- Block the way to any hazard, like a hot stove, stairs or busy street.
- Speak softly and be reassuring.
- Explain to others what is happening.
- Offer help as the seizure ends.
- Stay with the person until he or she is completely awake and aware again.

Sometimes, a person will seem angry during a seizure. If that happens, stand back until the seizure is over.

## SPECIAL FIRST AID

If a seizure happens in water, there are some special things to remember.

- Support the person in the water.
- Make sure her head is tilted so her face and head stay above the surface.
- Help her out of the water as soon as possible.
- Once on dry land, make sure she is breathing – if not, begin rescue breathing at once and call 911.

Anyone who's had a seizure in water should go to the emergency room for a checkup, even if he seems to be okay afterwards.

If he's swallowed a lot of water, it can damage the heart or lungs.

### FIRST AID TIP

- Prevent choking by turning the person on one side.

## **If a seizure happens in an airplane**

- If the plane isn't full, and if the seat arms can be folded up, help the person lie across three seats.
- If that's not possible, arrange pillows so her head doesn't hit unpadded areas of the plane.
- Try to lean the person towards one side so breathing isn't blocked.
- Help the flight crew respond to the seizure.

### **FIRST AID TIP**

- **Check how long the seizure lasts.**

## **When a seizure happens on a bus**

- Ease the person having the seizure across a double or triple seat. Cushion her head with something soft.
- Help turn her on one side, and
- Explain what's happening to the other passengers.

## WHY A MEDICAL I.D. HELPS

Sometimes people misunderstand seizures. They think they are part of other health problems.

They may even think they are caused by alcohol or drug abuse.

Some people wear a medical I.D. necklace or bracelet. You can get them at drug stores.

Wearing an I.D. that says 'epilepsy' or 'seizure disorder' helps other people know at once that what they are seeing is a seizure. Then they'll know better how to help.

## TO FIND OUT MORE

To find out more about epilepsy, seizures, and first aid, call the Epilepsy Foundation toll-free (1-800-332-1000) or visit [www.epilepsyfoundation.org](http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org) or write to:

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435 I Garden City Drive  
Landover, MD 20785

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