

Patient information factsheet

Seizures

What is a seizure?

The words seizure, convulsion and fit all mean the same thing. A seizure happens when the brain's electrical rhythm goes wrong. Seizures can take many forms, and do not always involve the body going stiff, falling to the ground or jerking. This factsheet explains the different types of seizure that can occur in children and what to do if your child experiences one.

Types of seizure

Seizures can take many forms, since the brain is responsible for such a wide range of functions. Personality, sensations, consciousness or movements of the body can all be temporarily disturbed during the seizure. In simple terms a seizure can involve the whole brain (generalised) or only part of it (focal). Children may have more than one type of seizure.

There are several types of generalised seizures. The most common ones are:

- tonic clonic seizures – the child is unconscious and their whole body jerks uncontrollably
- absence seizures – the child appears vacant and may stare and not respond to voice or touch for a few seconds, but usually does not fall or jerk
- myoclonic jerks – single jerk of the whole body, which may cause a fall

Focal seizures are where only one part of the body shakes or simply feels strange. The child may appear confused or seem like they're 'not with it'.

What causes a seizure?

Epilepsy is a condition that affects the brain and causes repeated seizures. However, there are many other things that can cause a seizure such as low blood sugar, infection or an injury to the head. Sometimes the cause is not known.

Will it happen again?

Not necessarily. Seizures can occur in as many as one in 100 children, but many children who experience a seizure may never have a second one. Studies in children have shown that four out of every 10 children who have a first seizure will go on to have a second, so if your child does have a seizure make sure you let their school know, just in case.

Does this mean my child has epilepsy?

No. A child who has had only one seizure is not diagnosed as having epilepsy. Even if your child does have further seizures and is diagnosed as having epilepsy, they may grow out of it as they get older.

What to do if someone has a seizure (the advice is the same for children and adults)

- A Assess** the situation – are they in danger of injuring themselves? Remove any nearby objects that could cause injury.
- C Cushion** their head (with a jumper for example) to protect them from head injury.
- T Time** – check the time – if the seizure lasts longer than five minutes you should call an ambulance.
- I Identity** – look for a medical bracelet or ID card; if you don't know them it may give you information about their seizures and what to do.
- O Over** – once the seizure is over, put them on their side in the recovery position. Stay with them and reassure them as they come round (recover).
- N Never** restrain a person having a seizure, put something in their mouth or try to give them food or drink.



Keeping risks to a minimum

Because there is some risk of another seizure, it makes sense to think about safety.

This doesn't mean that your child will have to stop doing all the things they usually do, but it may mean putting things in place to keep risks to a minimum. Here are some examples:

- Encourage your child to shower rather than bathe. If your child does have a bath don't leave them unattended and never lock the door.
- While your child has a shower, consider having someone with them or just outside the door, checking that they're safe.
- If your child swims without you then ensure they tell the lifeguard or a responsible adult that they've had a seizure in the past.
- If your child rides a bike or scooter, ensure they wear a helmet. Use cycle lanes where possible.
- If you have free-standing heaters at home, try to place them out of the way so your child is less likely to bump into them if they fall over or trip during a seizure.
- Don't place their bed right up against a wall or next to a radiator. This should reduce the risk of your child banging or burning themselves if they experience jerking of their limbs during a seizure.

Call 999 and ask for an ambulance if:

- they're injured
- you know it's their first seizure
- the seizure lasts for more than five minutes
- one seizure follows another without them gaining consciousness between
- you believe they need urgent medical attention (they are turning blue or not breathing, for example)

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please telephone **023 8120 4688** for help.

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