
What is a seizure? What is epilepsy?

A seizure is an abnormal discharge of electrical activity in the brain. Epilepsy is when someone has 2 or more unprovoked (spontaneous) seizures for no known reason.

- There are many different types of seizures.
- Seizures can last different amounts of time.
- Seizure frequency (how often seizures happen) is different for each child.

What causes seizures?

Seizures may be caused by many reasons. Some reasons include:

- Infection from a germ or virus.
- Trauma or sudden injury to the head.
- Lack of oxygen to the brain.
- Fever. (A high fever may cause seizures in some children between the ages of 6 months to 5 years. These seizures are called febrile seizures.)
- Reasons that are not known.

What are the possible symptoms?

A seizure often changes how your child looks or acts. Seizures may cause your child to lose consciousness. Some children will not remember that the seizure happened.

Your child may have 1 or more of these:

- Falling
- Shaking or jerking
- Uncontrollable or involuntary muscle spasms
- Drooling from the mouth
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Staring
- Confusion

What tests could my child have?

In some cases, your child may need 1 or more of these tests:

- Physical exam
- Electroencephalogram (EEG)
- Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)
- Blood tests

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

New onset seizure, continued

What is the treatment?

If your child is diagnosed with epilepsy, your child's provider will teach you basic seizure precautions in case your child has another seizure.

Sometimes, the provider may order a rescue (emergency) medicine like Diastat or Nayzilam.

Keep the rescue medicine with your child and available at all times so that you will be able to get to it quickly when a seizure happens. Know when the medicine expires, and replace it when this date passes.

Some children need to take medicine every day to help prevent seizures. Medicine does not cure seizures. There are many different types of seizure medicines. Your child's provider will order medicine based on:

- Your child's type of seizures.
- Your child's age.
- Your child's weight.
- Possible side effects.

It is very important that your child takes the seizure medicine as ordered. Do not let your child stop taking any medicine without talking with the provider first.

If your child takes medicine, here are some important tips to remember:

- Make sure your child takes the proper dose and takes it on time.
- Watch for any side effects, such as rash, fatigue or tiredness, nausea, loss of balance, vision changes and weight gain.
- Talk with your child's provider about other options if your child keeps having seizures or trouble with side effects.
- **Always talk with the provider before making any changes to your child's medicine.** Medicine often works so well that parents and caregivers are tempted to take their child off it or reduce the dose. Doing so without talking with your provider could cause a serious increase in seizures.

Here are some tips that can help you and your child remember when they need to take medicine:

- Keep medicine in a convenient spot, so it becomes part of other daily activities. For example, keep it near your child's toothbrush or in the kitchen.
- Set an alarm on your cell phone to remind you and your child when they need to take medicine.
- Get a pillbox, and count out the needed amount of pills for each day.
- Make sure to refill prescriptions on time, so you do not run out of medicine.

If medicine does not control or stop the seizures, other possible treatment options may include surgery, a medical device or a very specialized, high-fat diet (ketogenic).

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New onset seizure, continued

What should I do if my child has a seizure?

If your child has a seizure:

- Keep calm. Stay with them.
- Move them to a flat surface. Put something soft under their head.
- Remove all hot or sharp objects from the area.
- Loosen tight clothing, especially around their neck.
- Turn them on their side, so they do not choke on their saliva or vomit.
- Do not put anything in their mouth. They will not choke on their tongue.
- Do not try to restrain them during a seizure.
- Your child may fall asleep after the seizure. This is called the postictal (post-IC-tal) phase. Do not try to give them food or drink until they are awake and alert.
- Give Diastat or Nayzilam (if you have it) if the seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes or if your child has 3 or more seizures in 1 hour.
- Call your child's provider to give details about seizure activity.

What activities should my child avoid?

Most children with epilepsy live full, active lives that include school, friends, sports and other activities. There are some factors that could affect your child's life. This includes the type of epilepsy they have, success of treatment and many other factors. Talk with your child's provider about what activities your child can and cannot do.

The more you know about epilepsy and the more you talk with your child's care team about your child's needs, the better chance your team will reach its goal of making sure your child's life is as healthy and happy as possible.

When should I call my child's provider?

Call your child's provider if your child has:

- A seizure.
- A different type of seizure.

Take your child to the nearest emergency department (ED) or call 911 if:

- Their seizure does not stop after you give Diastat or Nayzilam.
- They do not return to their usual self after the seizure.
- They have trouble breathing.

Where can I learn more?

Visit choa.org/epilepsy for a list of online resources.

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New onset seizure, continued

You can also scan the QR code below to watch a short video about what to do when someone has a seizure.

Seizure First Aid

Epilepsy Foundation



Children's Healthcare of Atlanta has not reviewed all of the sites listed as resources and does not make any representations regarding their content or accuracy. Children's Healthcare of Atlanta does not recommend or endorse any particular products, services or the content or use of any third party websites, or make any determination that such products, services or websites are necessary or appropriate for you or for the use in rendering care to patients. Children's Healthcare of Atlanta is not responsible for the content of any of the above-referenced sites or any sites linked to these Sites. Use of the links provided on this or other sites is at your sole risk.

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

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