



Seizure control and beyond

The Impact of Uncontrolled Seizures

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What is a seizure?

A seizure happens when a sudden change in electrical activity within the brain causes physical symptoms. Depending on the location of the impulses within the brain, different symptoms may occur.

A seizure is sometimes very mild—such as a tingling feeling or a few moments of confusion—or it may be severe, including a complete loss of consciousness. Sometimes people can tell that a seizure is about to happen, but other times a seizure may occur without warning.

What is a seizure disorder?

A seizure disorder is a condition in which there are instances of sudden, uncontrollable electrical activity in the brain that temporarily cause a change in how a person feels or behaves. Often the disorder is called *epilepsy*, a word that comes from the Greek *epilepsia*, which means “a seizing or taking-hold of.”

A diagnosis of a seizure disorder is made after a person experiences at least two seizures, and after eliminating other medical conditions that may cause seizures, such as very low blood sugar, tumors, or withdrawal from drugs or alcohol.

What causes seizure disorders?

There are many different reasons why a person may develop a seizure disorder. In some cases, having a family member who has the condition may increase a person's chances of developing it also. Other times a seizure disorder is caused by a brain injury or infection. Often, however, the actual cause is not known.

Who usually gets seizure disorders?

New diagnoses of seizure disorders usually are made either in young children or in older adults. As described above, there may be a higher chance of developing a seizure disorder if a person has experienced a head injury or an infection within the central nervous system, or if a family member has also been diagnosed.

Can seizures be controlled?

Yes—many different medications have been shown to be effective in helping to control seizure activity. For many people one medication is all that's needed to provide effective control. Sometimes a person has to try different types of drugs to find one that works—and other times a combination of drugs is needed.

Some people try many drugs over a period of years, but still do not have effective seizure control. These patients may have drug resistant seizure disorders. For these individuals, other options may prove helpful. Research has shown that a person whose seizures are not controlled by the first or second drug is not likely to achieve control with additional drugs—so the sooner such alternatives are offered, the more benefit they may provide.

In addition to medication, there are other treatment options that may improve seizure control:

- The ketogenic diet—a doctor-supervised high-fat, low-carbohydrate diet—has been shown to help control seizures in children
- Vagus nerve stimulation (VNS Therapy™) is a non-drug therapy that works like a pacemaker to help people for whom drugs alone do not provide effective control
- Brain surgery can help people who have serious seizures that cannot be controlled by medication

Don't believe the myths about seizure disorders

Long ago, people who experienced seizures were thought to be possessed by demons. Even within the last century, people who had seizures were often considered insane or mentally deficient, and were prevented from going to school or having jobs or families of their own.

Today, thanks to the efforts of organizations like [the Epilepsy Foundation](#), there is more understanding of seizure disorders among the general public. There are more—and more effective—treatments available, and people who have seizure disorders can live active, rewarding lives and enjoy normal activities like going to school and having careers.

Visit the [Resources](#) page to find additional information and links to support groups.