

Epilepsy is a disorder in which nerve cell activity in the brain is disturbed, causing seizures.



What I Should Know about Seizures & Epilepsy

What are seizures?

- Seizures are caused by unusual electrical activity in the brain. This activity can cause many of the different symptoms seen in seizures.
- There are many different types of seizures. They are given names based on where they take place in the brain, and what kinds of symptoms they cause.
- Seizures can look very different. Some can cause people to be confused or stare off into space. Others can cause people to pass out and fall. Some cause people's muscles to become stiff and jerk. Some cause people to go completely limp.

What is epilepsy?

- People are diagnosed with epilepsy after having two or more seizures that happen more than 24 hours apart. The seizures are not caused by other medical problems.
- Epilepsy has many different causes, like:
 - » Genetic causes
 - » Head and brain injuries
 - » Changes in levels of nutrients in your body



Who gets epilepsy?

- Anyone can have epilepsy. In the USA, about 2% of adults and 1% of children have epilepsy.
- Epilepsy is much more common in people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including people with autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
- Some people are born with epilepsy, but others can develop it as a child, as an adult, or when they get older.

What if I think I have had a seizure? What next?

- If you think you may have had a seizure it is important to tell your doctor.
- Describe the seizure to your doctor. This will help your doctor know what kind of seizure you had.
- Share with your doctor other people's descriptions of what they witnessed.



What can I do if I have epilepsy?



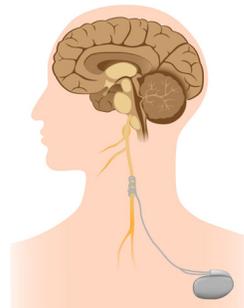
There are many ways that seizures can be treated. There are medications (called anti-epileptics or anti-convulsants) that can help. It is very important to take your medication exactly as your doctor advises.

Sometimes a seizure can be very long and last for longer than 5 minutes, or they can happen in a series lasting longer than 30 minutes. This is called “status epilepticus,” or just “status.” This is very serious and requires emergency medication as fast as possible to help stop the seizure.

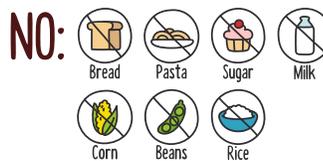
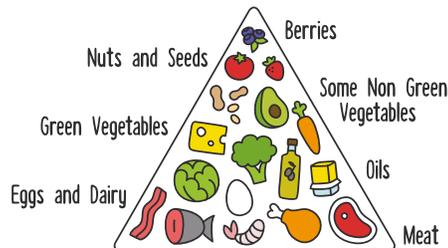
Medicine is not the only option

Epilepsy may also be treated with exercise and diet changes, electrical stimulation of the brain, and surgery.

- **Vagus nerve stimulation (VNS)** can help control the activity in your brain and reduce how often you have seizures. VNS can also help replace your need for some medications, or help reduce their side effects. VNS helps regulate the activity in your brain by stimulating it at set times. It requires surgery to place the equipment.
- **Diet and exercise** can help you manage epilepsy. A special diet called the ketogenic diet can be very helpful. Eating a high-fat, low-protein and very low-carbohydrate diet can help control the chemicals in your brain. This stabilizes your brain and helps to keep you from having seizures.



KETO Food Pyramid



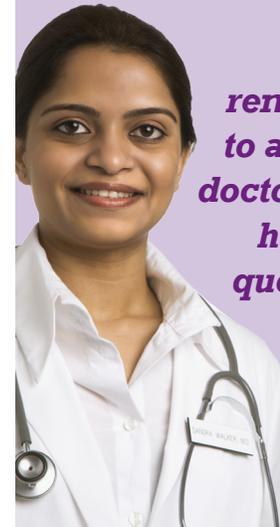
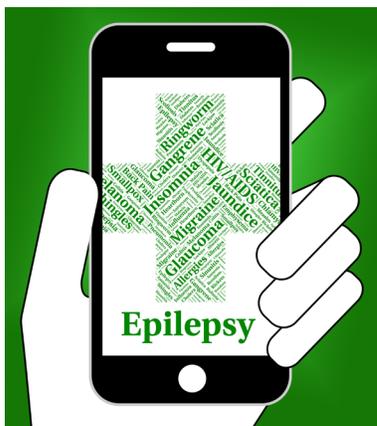
Triggers of seizures

Some seizures can be “triggered” by different events or substances. For example, bright lights, the time of day, illnesses, the use of drugs or alcohol, certain foods and even stress can bring on a seizure. Take note of the different things that happen around the time of your seizures. If you notice that you have certain triggers tell your doctor.

Knowing the trigger can help you and your doctor come up with a plan to help you avoid them.

Always keep a record of your seizures

Both you and your family or caregiver need to keep track. It is especially important since you may not remember the details of each seizure. This will help your doctor know how well your medication works, and if your seizures are well controlled. People can use calendars, diaries, online dairies and apps for their smart phones. Some good examples can be found by searching for “seizure diary” on the internet.



Always remember to ask your doctor if you have any questions!

Perkins, E. A., & VanZant, S. (2016). *What I should know about seizures & epilepsy*. Education for Lifelong Health Series, Florida Center for Inclusive Communities.

Development of this material was supported by the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (#90-DD-0668).

For further information, contact Dr. Elizabeth Perkins (813) 974-7076, eperkins@usf.edu, or visit www.flcic.org

