

Recognising Seizures and When to Call an Ambulance

Central London Community Healthcare 

NHS Trust

Your healthcare closer to home

Objectives

- Recognising some common seizure types
- Know appropriate first aid
- To be able to recognise when a seizure becomes a medical emergency

What is a seizure?

- A seizure is a sudden burst of electrical activity in the brain that can alter one or more of the following:
 - Movement
 - Sensation
 - Behaviour
 - Awareness

True or False?

- Most seizures are considered a medical emergency
- People are aware that they are having a seizure
- Epilepsy is a form of mental illness
- Patients can swallow their tongue during a seizure

Seizure Types

- **Partial Seizures:**
 - Involve only part of the brain
 - Common types include absence and focal seizures
 - Symptoms relate to the part of the brain affected
- **Generalised Seizures:**
 - Involve the whole brain
 - These are more serious and known as Tonic-Clonic seizures
 - Symptoms are usually loss of consciousness, a fall and convulsions

Focal Seizures

- Pause in activity with a blank stare
- Lapse of awareness
- Abnormal, often repetitive movements
- Easily mistaken for day-dreaming
- Can last a few seconds to a few minutes

Generalised Tonic-Clonic

- Loss of consciousness
- A fall
- Convulsions (stiffening of arms and legs followed by jerking)
- Shallow breathing and drooling may occur
- Possible loss of bowel and bladder control
- Occasionally skin, nails and lips may turn blue
- Most seizures last up to 3 minutes
- When the seizure ends it is often followed by confusion, disorientation, headache, tiredness, soreness and speech difficulty. This can last 5-30 minutes post seizure

Alcohol Withdrawal Syndrome

- Minor Symptoms can include:
- Shaking hands
- Profuse Sweating
- Anxiety
- Restless / Agitated
- Palpitations
- Craving for alcohol
- Some people may experience hallucinations (visual, auditory or tactile)

Alcohol Withdrawal Seizures

- Majority of people have seizures within 24 – 48 hours after stopping drinking
- However they can start as quickly as 2 hours following a persons last drink
- High risk of seizures if someone has had multiple detox's in the past
- They are generalised under the name Tonic-Clonic seizures
- Will most likely need medication to stop seizures from happening again (this needs to be done in a hospital setting)

SPICE related seizures

- Spice related seizures can vary from Absent/ Focal to Generalised Tonic-Clonic
- Most symptoms are self-limiting and resolve on their own
- There is no current antidote to SPICE
- Treatments are based on how someone presents
- Is sometimes used alongside other drugs (poly-drug use)
- If someone has used more than one drug, see if you are able to find out from the patient or friend what else they have taken

First Aid

- Stay calm and time the seizure
- Remove possible hazards (neck ties, chairs, tables, sharp objects)
- Cushion the head (use hand if nothing else available)
- Check for Epilepsy or seizure I.D bracelet, necklace, card
- When the seizure ends, turn the patient in to the recovery position
- Stay with the person until they have recovered from the seizure and offer support

DANGEROUS First Aid

- DO NOT put anything in the patients mouth
- DO NOT hold down or restrain
- DO NOT attempt to give oral medications, food or drink during a seizure

When is a Seizure an emergency?

- If the seizure lasts **more than 5 minutes**
- If one seizure follows another before they have fully recovered
- If it is the persons first seizure
- If they are injured, diabetic or pregnant
- If a normal breathing pattern does not resume

More Information

- <https://www.epilepsy.org.uk/info/firstaid/what-to-do>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gWZGMABBFYo> This is a real seizure which really shows you what someone may look like which is why they can be quite intimidating to manage
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTWGEfHrWNE> another seizure which is really interesting to see his slow recovery

REMEMBER

If YOU are in ANY doubt...

Call for an ambulance!