

- Epilepsy is a neurological condition – meaning it affects the brain. It is also a physical condition, because the body is affected when someone has a seizure.
- Epilepsy is described as the tendency to have seizures that start in the brain. Epilepsy is usually only diagnosed after the person has had more than one seizure.
- The Greek philosopher Hippocrates (460 – 377 BC) was the first person to think that epilepsy starts in the brain.
- Anyone can have a seizure if the circumstances are ‘right’, but most people do not have seizures under ‘normal conditions’.
- Seizures happen when there is a sudden interruption in the way the brain normally works. In between seizures the brain functions normally.
- Epilepsy is a variable condition that affects different people in different ways.
- There are over 60 different types of seizure, grouped into three main classifications: focal onset, generalised onset, and unknown onset.
- What seizures look like can vary. For example, someone may go ‘blank’ for a couple of seconds, they may wander around and be quite confused, or they may fall to the ground and shake. So not all seizures involve shaking.
- Some people are unconscious during their seizures, so they do not remember what happens to them. Others experience loss of awareness and only remember parts of the seizure. Having a description of what happened from someone who saw their seizure can help with diagnosis. This is sometimes called an ‘eyewitness account’. Some people remember all aspects of their seizure.
- Epilepsy can be difficult to diagnose. Different tests that might be done to help with diagnosis include an Electroencephalogram (EEG) or a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scan.
- Different epilepsies are due to many different underlying causes. Causes can be complex, and hard to identify. Researchers now believe that the chance of developing epilepsy is probably always genetic to some extent. However, a person may start having seizures due to a brain injury or stroke.
- Epilepsy can start at any age. For some people, their epilepsy might ‘go away’ and they stop having seizures. This is sometimes called spontaneous remission.
- Epilepsy is usually treated with anti-seizure medication (ASM). ASM aims to stop seizures from happening, but does not cure epilepsy.
- With the right ASM, up to 70% of people with epilepsy could have their seizures controlled.
- The first ASM was phenobarbitone in 1912. There are now about 30 different ASMs available in the UK.
- For people who do not have their seizures controlled with ASMs, surgery may be an option. This can involve removing the part of their brain that causes the seizures.
- Some people may have a form of treatment called Vagus Nerve Stimulation therapy (VNS) to help control their epilepsy. This involves having a special device implanted in the chest that sends regular electrical signals to the brain through the vagus nerve in the neck.
- St Valentine is the patron saint of people with epilepsy.

This factsheet lists some interesting facts about epilepsy. If you would like to know more, visit our website or call our helpline.

Helpline 01494 601400
Confidential, national call rate.
Information and emotional support.
Visit epilepsysociety.org.uk/helpline
for opening hours.

- People with epilepsy are protected under the Equality Act 2010, a law that aims to protect people against different types of discrimination.
- Up to 10% of people worldwide will have a one-off seizure at some point in their life (although this does not necessarily mean they have epilepsy).
- Around 79 people are diagnosed with epilepsy every day in the UK.
- There are over 600,000 people in the UK who have epilepsy - about one in every 100 people.
- There are around 50 million people with epilepsy in the world.
- Up to 5% of people with epilepsy are affected by flashing lights (called photosensitive epilepsy), so most people with epilepsy do not have seizures triggered by flashing lights.

When to call an ambulance

Usually, when a person has a seizure, there is no need to call 999 for an ambulance. However, always **do** call an ambulance if:

- you know it is the person's first seizure;
- they have injured themselves badly;
- they have trouble breathing after the seizure has stopped;
- one seizure immediately follows another with no recovery in between;
- the seizure lasts two minutes longer than is usual for them; or
- you do not know how long their seizures last.

For someone you do not know follow our basic first aid messages: Calm, Cushion, Call.

Visit [epilepsysociety.org.uk/ccc](https://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk/ccc)

What to do if someone you don't know has a seizure

How you can help someone during a seizure will depend on the type of seizures they have, and how much you know about their epilepsy.

If you don't know the person, follow our basic first aid message:

1. Calm

Stay calm and take control of the situation

2. Cushion

Cushion their head with something soft

3. Call

Call an ambulance



Visit [epilepsysociety.org.uk/ccc](https://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk/ccc)

If they seem confused, stay with them, talk calmly and quietly, and gently guide them away from any danger.

For more detailed information, visit [epilepsysociety.org.uk/first-aid](https://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk/first-aid)

For a printed copy of this information contact our helpline.

Epilepsy Society

Chesham Lane,
Chalfont St Peter,
Buckinghamshire
SL9 0RJ



Every effort is made to ensure that all information is correct at the time of printing. Please note that information is intended for a UK audience. This information is not a substitute for advice from your own doctors. Epilepsy Society is not responsible for any actions taken as a result of using this information.

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