

Did you know?



- 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 four main classifications: focal, generalised, unknown, and unclassified.
- 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.

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

Helpline 0300 102 0024
Confidential, freephone number.
Information and emotional support.
Visit epilepsysociety.org.uk/helpline
for opening hours.

- For people who do not have their seizures controlled with ASMs, other treatments may be available. Surgery may be an option, or a special diet called the ketogenic diet. Some people may have a form of treatment called vagus nerve stimulation (VNS) therapy or treatment with EASEE® (Epicranial Application of Stimulation Electrodes for Epilepsy). These two treatments involve a special device being implanted that sends signals to the brain to try and control seizures.

Visit epilepsysociety.org.uk/about-epilepsy/treatment

- St Valentine is the patron saint of people with epilepsy.
- 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.
- Around 3% 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.

What to do if someone 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/ccs

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



Patient Information Forum

Every effort is made to ensure that all information is correct at the time of publishing. 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.

For a printed copy of this information contact our helpline.

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