



# Seizures

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Having a seizure can be frightening for you and others around you. This handout will help to answer some of your questions and gives information on what others can do if you have a seizure.

## What is a seizure?

A seizure is a very sudden, strong and brief surge of electrical activity in the brain. This activity mixes up the brain's normal control of body movement and behaviour. Because of this, a seizure can cause temporary changes in how a person feels or behaves. Rarely does a seizure damage the brain.

## What causes a seizure?

Sometimes the cause of a seizure is unknown. Common causes of seizures include:

- Brain tumour or stroke
- Head injury or trauma
- High fever or infection
- Meningitis or viral encephalitis
- Poisoning
- Blood electrolyte disorders
- Very high or low blood sugar levels
- Alcohol withdrawal
- Epilepsy

**Talk to your doctor about the causes of your seizure.**

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## Will I get a warning sign before a seizure?

Some people have a warning sign before the seizure takes place. You may notice one or more of these signs:

- feel a change in body temperature
- feel anxious or tense
- hear music
- notice a strange smell, taste or both

Keep track of any warning signs that you have and tell your doctor. It can help your doctor to identify the type of seizure you had.

## How can others help me during a seizure?

Helping someone who is having a seizure is easier than most think.

**Here are 6 simple steps:**

1. **Keep calm.** Seizures may appear frightening to the onlooker. They usually last only a few minutes and usually do not require medical help.
2. **Protect the person from injury.** Move any hard, sharp, or hot objects well away from the person. Protect the person's head and body from injury. Loosen any tight neckwear.
3. **Do not restrain the person.** Gently guide the person away from dangerous areas like stairs. Trying to hold down a person having a seizure may hurt them and yourself.
4. **Do not put anything in the person's mouth.** The person is not going to swallow their tongue. Trying to open their mouth with an object may break their teeth or cause other injuries.
5. **Roll the person on their side after the seizure subsides.** This will help keep their airway open.



**If a seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes, or repeats without the person returning to normal, call 911 right away.**

6. **Talk gently to the person.** After the seizure, comfort the person. If the person begins to wander, stay with them and talk gently to them.

For more information about how to help someone having a seizure talk to your doctor or other health care providers.

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## What can I do to help prevent seizures?

You may find that some things trigger your seizure. These can include activities you do, feelings you have or triggers within your surroundings.

Here are some common triggers:

- lack of sleep
- alcohol
- forgetting your medication
- over-the-counter drugs – check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking.
- unhealthy diet – follow Canada's Food Guide to Health Eating.
- flashing lights – such as in some video games
- stress

## What do I need to know about my seizure medication?

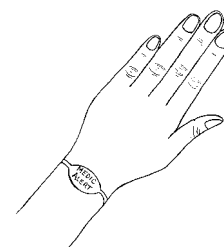
You may need to take medications to help control your seizures.

Here are some tips:

- Do not stop taking your medication even if you are no longer having seizures.
- Do not skip doses. Talk to your doctor about what to do if you miss a dose.
- Refill your prescription at least 1 week before the medication runs out.
- Keep your medication out of reach of children.
- Do not mix alcohol and your medication.
- Your family doctor will need to monitor your blood levels of the seizure medication(s) you are taking.

## What should I do if I have a seizure?

When you have a seizure there is no way for you to stop it. You should get a MedicAlert™ or other Medical ID bracelet or necklace. This will help others around you to know that you are having a seizure. Share the information in this pamphlet with your family and friends so that they understand and can help you.



## How can I make my home safe?

Here are some ideas to help you improve your safety at home:

- Keep bathroom and bedroom doors unlocked.
- Do not take baths – take showers instead. This will help you to avoid drowning if you have a seizure.
- Replace your glass doors with safety glass or plastic.
- Take your plates, bowls and mugs to the stove instead of carrying the hot item to the table.
- Turn your pot and pan handles inwards while cooking.

## Can I still do the activities I used to do?

You will be able to do most of the activities that you used to do such as washing the dishes, showering, cooking and walking. Talk with your doctor about which activities are right for you.

## What about driving?

Ask your doctor when you can drive again.

## What about physical activity?

Leading an active lifestyle is an important part of being healthy. There are no reasons that you cannot be active if you have seizures. Think about the activity that you would like to do and the possible dangers if you were to have a seizure while doing that activity. Some common activities that are usually safe include:

- jogging
- aerobics
- cross-country skiing
- dancing
- hiking
- golf
- bowling
- tennis

Ask your doctor about which activities are right for you.

## For more information on seizures contact:

- Your doctor or other health care workers
- Epilepsy Canada, [www.epilepsy.ca](http://www.epilepsy.ca)

## What are the types of seizures?

There are 5 common types of seizures.

Type of Seizure	What are the common symptoms and behaviours?	Will I lose consciousness?
<b>1. Simple Partial Seizures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>notice a strange smell</li> <li>feel the need to move</li> <li>notice changes in your vision</li> <li>feel an upset stomach</li> <li>jerking of one part or side of your body</li> </ul>	No
<b>2. Complex Partial Seizures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>wander</li> <li>mumble</li> <li>repeat odd movements such as arm jerking</li> <li>appear dazed or confused</li> </ul>	Yes
<b>3. Generalized Absence Seizures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>stare into space</li> </ul>	Yes
<b>4. Tonic-Clonic Seizures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fall down</li> <li>have a stiffened body</li> <li>drool</li> <li>bite your tongue</li> </ul>	Yes  This type of seizure usually lasts less than 3 minutes.
<b>5. Status Epilepticus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>appear dazed</li> <li>have muscle contractions or spasms</li> </ul>	Yes  This type of seizure happens one after the other and does not stop.