

# Learning about seizures

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## What are seizures?

Seizures, also called convulsions, are caused by bursts of abnormal electrical activity stimulating the brain. A seizure may last a few seconds to a few minutes and usually stops on its own. When the seizure ends, the brain's usual electrical activity resumes. Seizures do not damage the brain unless they are long (more than 30 minutes).

## What do seizures look like?

A seizure can happen when the baby is awake or asleep. Signs of a seizure can include one or more of the following:

- Jerky movements of the arms, legs or body that do not stop when you gently hold the baby
- A change in skin colour - turning pale or blue
- Sucking lip movements
- Eyes rolling backward
- A high pitched cry

**It may be hard to recognize a seizure in a baby.**

**The signs of a seizure may not be obvious.**

After a seizure the baby may be drowsy or fall asleep.

## What causes seizures?

There are many reasons why a baby may have a seizure. Sometimes the cause of the seizure is hard to find. **Sometimes the cause cannot be found.**

Some causes of seizures are:

- low blood sugar
- infections
- poor supply of blood or oxygen to the brain
- bleeding in the baby's brain
- a problem with the baby's brain or nervous system
- some metabolic diseases

## What tests does my baby need?

Your baby may need blood tests and other tests to help find the cause of the seizures.

Tests that give pictures of the brain include:

- Ultrasound scan of the head
- Computerized Axial Tomography or CT scan
- Magnetic Resonance Imaging scan or MRI

**Your baby's doctor will explain the results of your baby's tests as soon as they are available.**

An electroencephalogram or EEG is a test that shows the electrical activity of the brain. An EEG can show if your baby is having seizures and where the seizures happen in the brain.

A special monitor, called the Cerebral Function Monitor or CFM, may also be put on your baby. After cleaning your baby's scalp, three probes connected to wires are pasted on your baby's head, very much like the EEG machine. This CFM machine can be used at your baby's bedside to look at the electrical activity of your baby's brain.

## Will my baby have more seizures?

If your baby has had one seizure, there may not be another one. The risk of having another seizure depends on why the first seizure happened. You can talk with your baby's doctor about the cause of your baby's seizure and whether seizures are likely to happen again.

## What can be done to stop my baby's seizures?

Sometimes noise may start a seizure, so your baby may need a very quiet environment. You and your baby's caregivers may need to care and comfort your baby without 'handling' him or her too much.

Your baby may be given medications through the intravenous line to help stop or control the seizures. The most commonly used medications are Phenobarbital, Diazepam and Dilantin. Your baby may be given one or more of these medications.

Medications used to control seizures may make your baby very drowsy or sleepy. Your baby may need help breathing when the medications are first given. Your baby's health care team will regularly check your baby for any sign of side effects.

**If you have any questions about seizures or your baby, please speak with a member of your care team.**