

Frequently Asked Questions

Q 1. What is epilepsy? What is a seizure?

A Epilepsy, also called a seizure disorder, is a disorder of the brain. A person is diagnosed with epilepsy when they have had two or more seizures.

Seizures, a short change in normal brain activity, are the main sign of epilepsy. Some seizures can look like staring spells. Other seizures cause a person to fall, shake, and lose awareness of what's going on around them.

Q 2. How long do seizures usually last?

A A seizure usually lasts from a few seconds to a few minutes depending on the type of seizure.

Q 3. What are the major types of seizures?

A Seizures are classified into two groups:

1. Generalized seizures affect both sides of the brain.
2. Focal seizures affect just one area of the brain. These seizures are also called partial seizures.

Q 4. If I have a seizure, does that mean I have epilepsy?

A Not always. Seizures can also happen because of other medical problems. These problems include:

- A high fever.
- Low blood sugar.
- Alcohol or drug withdrawal.

Q 5. What causes epilepsy?

A For 2 out of 3 people, the cause of epilepsy is unknown (cryptogenic or idiopathic). Epilepsy can be caused by different conditions that affect a person's brain. Some known causes include:

- [Stroke](#).
- Brain tumor.
- Brain infection from parasites (malaria, [neurocysticercosis](#)), viruses (influenza, dengue, Zika), and bacteria.
- [Traumatic brain injury](#) or head injury.
- Loss of oxygen to the brain (for example, during birth).
- Some genetic disorders (such as [Down syndrome](#)).
- Other neurologic diseases (such as [Alzheimer's disease](#)).

Q 6. What are the different types of seizures?

A There are two main groups of seizures. A person with epilepsy can have more than one type of seizure.

1. Generalized seizures affect both sides of the brain.

- Absence seizures or petit mal seizures, can cause rapid blinking or brief staring into space.
- Tonic-clonic seizures or grand mal seizures, can make a person
 - Cry out.
 - Lose consciousness.
 - Fall to the ground.
 - Have muscle jerks or spasms.
 - Feel tired

2. Focal seizures are located in just one area of the brain. These seizures are also called partial seizures.

- Simple focal seizures affect a small part of the brain and can cause twitching or a change in sensation, such as a strange taste or smell.

Q 7. Is epilepsy common?

A Epilepsy is one of the most common conditions affecting the brain. In 2015, 1.2% of the US population had active epilepsy (95% CI* = 1.1-1.4). This is about 3.4 million people with epilepsy nationwide: 3 million adults and 470,000 children.

Q 8. How can I prevent epilepsy?

A While epilepsy usually cannot be prevented, these are some of the most common ways to reduce your risk of developing epilepsy:

- Have a healthy pregnancy. Some problems during pregnancy and childbirth may lead to epilepsy. Follow a [prenatal care](#) plan with your health care provider to keep you and your baby healthy.
- Prevent [brain injuries](#).
- Lower the chances of [stroke](#) and [heart disease](#).
- Be up-to-date on your [vaccinations](#).
- Wash your hands and prepare food safely to prevent infections such as [cysticercosis](#).

Q 9. What is SUDEP?

A Sudden Unexpected Death in Epilepsy or SUDEP is a fatal complication of epilepsy. It is defined as the sudden and unexpected, non-traumatic and non-drowning death of a person with epilepsy, without a toxicological or anatomical cause of death detected during the post-mortem examination.

There are about 1.16 cases of SUDEP for every 1,000 people with epilepsy, although estimates vary. This translates to approximately 3,000 deaths per year in the United States.

Q 10. What are the major risk factors for SUDEP?

A The main risk factors for SUDEP are:

- Uncontrolled or frequent seizures¹
- Generalized convulsive (also called tonic-clonic or grand mal) seizures.

Other possible risk factors may include:

- Seizures that begin at a young age.
- Many years of living with epilepsy.
- Missed doses of medicine.
- Drinking alcohol.



11. How do I prevent SUDEP?

A

- The first and most important step to reduce your risk of SUDEP is to *take your seizure medicine as prescribed.*
- Avoid seizure triggers, if these are known.
- Avoid drinking too much alcohol.
- Learn how to better control your seizures with epilepsy self-management programs.
- Get enough sleep.
- Train adults in the house in seizure first aid.

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