

Children & Seizures: Know the Hidden Signs

# Children and Seizures

Know the Hidden Signs



**EPILEPSY  
FOUNDATION**

Artwork by Studio Oppenheims  
Bridget B. (details on inside cover)

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#### About the Cover:

Cover artwork was created by Bridget B., a Studio E participant with the Epilepsy Foundation of Greater Cincinnati and Columbus. Studio E is a multi-week art therapy program open to people with epilepsy. It is provided through a partnership between the Epilepsy Foundation, its affiliates and Lundbeck. Participants use art to creatively express themselves, build confidence and make friends. Living with epilepsy can be challenging and art therapy may be beneficial in working through how the condition impacts an individual's life. Find out more about the program and where its available at [www.epilepsy.com](http://www.epilepsy.com).

#### Disclaimer:

This publication is designed to provide general information about epilepsy and seizures to the public. It is not intended as medical advice. People with epilepsy should not make changes to treatment or activities based on this information without first consulting their health care provider.

This publication was made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) under cooperative agreement number 1U58DP003832-03. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the CDC.



This pamphlet gives parents and teachers information on how to spot seizures in children. It also shares tips on what to do if you think a child you know might be having seizures.

## What is a seizure?

Our brains use electrical and chemical signals to control how we move, act and feel. A seizure happens when a person's brain is overloaded by an abnormal amount of electrical and chemical activity.

Some doctors describe a seizure as a "storm in the brain." While a seizure is happening, it causes temporary changes in how a person moves, acts or feels. Some signs of seizures that are easier to spot include:

- Loss of consciousness
- Convulsions (whole body shaking)
- Periods of confusion
- Uncontrolled shaking of an arm or leg

Some seizures are easier to recognize than others. This pamphlet will help you recognize the obvious seizure signs and symptoms, and those that are harder to spot.

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## Are there different types of seizures?

Yes. There are many types of seizures. The type of seizure a person has depends on where the abnormal activity happens in the brain — and how much of the brain is involved.

- **Generalized seizures** happen in the whole brain.
- **Partial (or focal) seizures** begin in one specific part of the brain.

Learn more about different types of seizures by visiting [www.epilepsy.com](http://www.epilepsy.com).

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My daughter had an episode where she seemed confused and disoriented. Then a few days later her teacher called me and said something similar happened at school. I took her to the doctor because I thought she might be having seizures. He said it could be epilepsy, but he needed to run some more tests first.

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## What is epilepsy?

Epilepsy (also called a “seizure disorder”) is a medical condition. Doctors will diagnose epilepsy if:

- A person has one or more seizures.
- The doctor thinks the person is likely to have more seizures.
- The seizure is not directly caused by another medical condition, like diabetes or a severe infection.

Epilepsy is a general term that includes people who have many different types of seizures. Some people with epilepsy have just one type of seizure, while other people have more than one type.

## At what age do children start having seizures?

Children can have seizures at any age. Some children start having seizures as babies, but others start having them as teenagers.

## How can I tell if a child may be having a seizure?

You can look for signs that a child may be having a seizure. Sometimes these signs are clear and sometimes they're difficult to see.

You may know that a child is having a seizure by the way she **moves**. For example, if she:

- Drops to the ground and shakes (has convulsions)
- Falls for no reason
- Goes stiff in her body
- Jerks her head, arms, legs, or whole body, especially early in the morning
- Moves repetitively (one way again and again)
- Bends at the waist when sitting or lying down (sometimes called a jackknife movement)

You may know that a child is having a seizure by the way she **acts**. For example, if she:

- Looks sleepy or confused
- Stares at nothing, rolls her eyes or blinks quickly

- Picks at her clothes
- Has gaps in her memory
- Mumbles or has trouble talking
- Chews, even if she has nothing in her mouth

You may know that a child is having a seizure by the way she **feels**. For example, if she:

- Says things look, sound, taste, smell or feel funny
- Seems sleepy or confused
- Appears afraid or anxious for no reason
- Has pain in her tongue (you may also notice she has blood on her tongue or pillow)
- Talks about pain in her stomach

“Over 300,000 children and teens in the United States have epilepsy, also called a seizure disorder.”



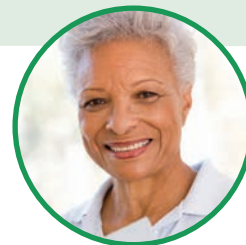
Remember that children sometimes do these things – like fall or act sleepy – even if they’re not having a seizure.

But trust your instincts when you see a child repeatedly move or act in unusual ways, or when a child reports unusual feelings again and again, over time. These movements, actions, or feelings may be signs of a seizure.

“

Look for repetitive actions that seem unusual. This is often a sign that a child is having recurring seizures.

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## What causes seizures in children?

More than 1 in every 100 children will have a seizure. Some causes of seizures in children include:

- A high fever
- An infection that goes to the brain
- A head injury
- Brain tumors
- Abnormal levels of sugar in the blood (as can happen with diabetes)

Just because a child has a seizure does not mean he has epilepsy. Only a doctor can make that diagnosis.



Babies or very young children sometimes have seizures that are harder to spot than older children. Some signs you might see in babies include:

- While sitting down, the baby suddenly jerks forward.
- While lying on her back, the baby suddenly grabs up at nothing with both arms while her knees jerk up.
- While sitting or lying down, the baby has a series of “jackknife” movements, bending at the waist.

“

One of my students told me that she was worried about her friend who seemed confused and wasn't acting right for a few minutes. A few days later it happened again, and I saw it this time. I thought it might be a seizure, so I let her mom know.

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## What should I do if I think a child is having seizures?

**If you're a teacher** and you think a child in your class is having seizures, tell the child's parent.

**If you're a parent** and you think your child is having seizures, talk to your child's doctor. The doctor will ask questions about what seizure signs you see in your child and may run some tests.

If the doctor thinks your child is having seizures, he may refer you to a neurologist (brain doctor).

A neurologist can tell you whether your child has epilepsy. If your child does have epilepsy, the neurologist will probably give him medicine. This medicine can't cure epilepsy, but it can stop seizures from happening when taken the right way.







“I would be talking to my son, and he would blank out for a few seconds. This kept happening and I was concerned. So, I checked it out with my son’s doctor.”

## Why is early treatment for seizures important?

A child who doesn’t get timely treatment for seizures may:

- Have other types of seizures
- Have seizures that are hard to control
- Struggle in school
- Get hurt while having a seizure
- Have trouble relating to people who don’t understand his unusual actions or behavior

A child who gets treatment early in life has the best chance of a normal childhood and adult life.

## Why is it important to report when you think a child has had a seizure?

When you think a child has had a seizure, it’s important that he get a medical checkup and possible treatment (medicine) right away. You’ll also want to learn what to do if another seizure happens.

Learn more, connect, and  
get involved.

Visit [www.epilepsy.com](http://www.epilepsy.com) or call  
1-800-332-1000 to:

- Learn about tests that can tell if  
someone has epilepsy.
- Look up information about different  
types of seizures.
- Find the latest information on  
treatments
- Get safety tips for home, work,  
and school.

Notes

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## About the Epilepsy Foundation

The Epilepsy Foundation, a national non-profit with 47 affiliated organizations throughout the United States, has led the fight against seizures since 1968. The Foundation is an unwavering ally for individuals and families impacted by epilepsy and seizures. The mission of the Epilepsy Foundation is to stop seizures and sudden unexpected death in epilepsy (SUDEP), find a cure and overcome the challenges created by epilepsy through efforts including education, advocacy and research to accelerate ideas into therapies. The Foundation works to ensure that people with seizures have the opportunity to live their lives to their fullest potential. **For additional information, please visit [www.epilepsy.com](http://www.epilepsy.com) or call us at 1.800.332.1000.**



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