

Epilepsy Information Sheet

A seizure occurs when nerve cells in the brain act abnormally. Epilepsy is a medical condition that produces seizures affecting a variety of mental and physical functions. Two or more unprovoked seizures diagnose a person with epilepsy.

Doctors classify seizures based on the location of the abnormal brain activity.

Focal (partial) seizures appear to result from abnormal activity in just one area of the brain.

- Simple focal seizures may alter emotions or change the way things look, smell, feel, taste or sound. They may also result in involuntary jerking of a body part, such as an arm or leg, and sensory symptoms such as tingling, dizziness and flashing lights. They do not result in loss of consciousness.
- Dyscognitive focal seizures alter consciousness or awareness and may cause a person to lose awareness for a period. They often result in staring and purposeless movements, such as hand rubbing, chewing, swallowing or walking in circles. Dyscognitive seizures produce impairment(s) in perception, attention, emotion, memory or executive function. (Dyscognitive Seizures, 2013)

Generalized seizures seem to involve all areas of the brain.

- Absence seizures, also called petit mal seizures, present as staring and subtle body movement. These seizures can cause a brief loss of awareness.
- Myoclonic seizures usually appear as sudden brief jerks or twitches of the arms and legs.
- Atonic seizures, also known as drop seizures, result in a loss of muscle control, which may cause the student to suddenly collapse or fall down.
- Tonic seizures cause stiffening of the muscles, usually those in the back, arms and legs. The seizure may cause the student to fall to the ground.
- Clonic seizures are associated with rhythmic, jerking muscle movements. These seizures usually affect the neck, face and arms.
- Tonic-clonic seizures, also called grand mal seizures, include loss of consciousness and stiffening and shaking of the body. There may be loss of bladder control or biting the tongue.

Symptoms

Symptoms vary depending on the type of seizure. In most cases, a person with epilepsy will tend to have the same type of seizure each time, so the symptoms will be similar from episode to episode. They may include staring, temporary confusion, loss of consciousness or awareness and/or uncontrollable jerking movements of the arms and legs.

Educational Implications

Seizures, medications and clinic visits may increase absences.

Some students have memory storage and retrieval issues.

Processing delays, comprehension and abstract reasoning can affect some students.

Some students have difficulty with concentration, distractibility, impulsivity and disorganization.

Medication side effects include delayed response and inconsistent performance for some students.

Some students become lethargic and tired.

There may be reduced visual and motor functioning.

Some students experience changes in personality and relationships.

Educational Options

Those students whose epilepsy adversely affects their educational performance may benefit from special education. It is important to consider all categorical areas to determine the appropriate placement for a student.

IEP teams determine placement in the least restrictive environment for students, including those with chronic or acute health conditions. A student who does not require special instruction and related services can receive a wide range of supports in the general education classroom, including accommodations, an Individualized Health Plan (IHP), an Emergency Care Plan (ECP) and local education agency supports. If a student with a health condition does not qualify for special education, a 504 plan, which can include accommodations and modifications for the classroom and assessments, can be considered.

Resources

[Epilepsy Foundation of Minnesota](http://www.epilepsyfoundationmn.org/) (<http://www.epilepsyfoundationmn.org/>)

[National Epilepsy Foundation](http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org/index.cfm) (<http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org/index.cfm>)

[Minnesota Epilepsy Group](http://www.mnepilepsy.org) (<http://www.mnepilepsy.org>)

[Mayo Clinic: Epilepsy](http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org)
(<http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org><http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/epilepsy/DS00342g>)