



OBSERVING AND RECORDING SEIZURES

Good observation and recording of seizures is vital to the diagnosis and ongoing management of epilepsy. This guide explains what to do.

Seizures present in many different ways. However, few doctors see their patients having seizures. An eyewitness description from family, friends, caregivers or teachers can assist with identifying the seizure type. It is essential to ask the person with epilepsy what they experienced during seizures. It is more important to describe what you see the person do before, during and after the seizure than to try to decide the seizure type yourself.

Seizure stages

Seizures generally have different stages. It is important to document all stages.

1. Beginning of the seizure (ictal period)

This is often termed the 'aura' or 'warning' by many people with epilepsy and is actually a simple partial seizure. These usually last a matter of seconds, but can last several hours. Some people experience a feeling such as numbness or tingling, nausea, 'butterflies' in the stomach, fear, an unusual taste or smell, hallucinations, or déjà vu. There may be a change in mood or behaviour prior to a seizure. Often people have trouble describing their 'aura'.

Keeping a diary of seizure details is of great value in determining progress, management, triggers, patterns and distinguishing seizure-related behaviour from other behaviours.

Important points to observe and record:

- A** What was the person doing immediately prior to the seizure?
- B** What called your attention to the seizure, e.g. a cry, fall, jerking, staring or head turning?

2. The seizure itself (ictal period)

Seizures may look very different. They can vary from confusion and behavioural changes to a convulsion. The active phase of the seizure will almost always involve some change in, or loss of, awareness or consciousness. Most seizures will last from a few seconds to minutes.

Important points to observe and record:

- A** What did the person do during the seizure?
 - ☐ Any head, eye, limb or body movements?
 - ☐ Staring, wandering, mumbling, fidgeting or any other unusual behaviour?
 - ☐ Did they appear to be confused?
 - ☐ Did they respond when you spoke to them?
 - ☐ Did you notice any colour change such as blushing or paleness?
 - ☐ Did they bite their tongue?
 - ☐ Did they lose control of their bladder?

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B How long did the seizure last?

- ☐ If you are observing a tonic clonic seizure, record how long it takes from the time the jerking starts until it finishes.
- ☐ If you are observing a complex partial seizure, record how long the person was unresponsive.

3. Period after the seizure (postictal period)

Few people have an immediate recovery following a seizure. It is quite common to experience a period of confusion, drowsiness, agitation and possibly speech and coordination problems afterwards. This period usually lasts for a few minutes to several hours. In rare instances, it can last several days. The behaviour during this time is sometimes mistaken for seizure activity.

Important points to observe and record:

- A** How did the person appear after the seizure?
- ☐ Were they drowsy?
 - ☐ Did they have difficulties with breathing, speaking, moving or walking?
 - ☐ Were they confused or disoriented?
- B** How long did it take for them to respond to you?
- C** Could they recall anything about the seizure?

What should you do after the seizure?

- ☐ Check the person is breathing normally.
- ☐ Check the person for any injuries.
- ☐ Note the date and time of the seizure and how long it lasted.
- ☐ Record what the person was doing before, during and after the seizure.
- ☐ Record what was done during the seizure to keep the person safe.
- ☐ Record any medications given before, during or after the seizure.

Dial 000 for an ambulance if:

- ♦ You are in any doubt.
- ♦ The seizure occurs in water.
- ♦ You arrive after the seizure has started.
- ♦ Injury has occurred.
- ♦ Food, drink or vomit was in the person's mouth during the seizure.
- ♦ The jerking lasts longer than five minutes or longer than normal for that person.
- ♦ Another seizure follows quickly.
- ♦ A complex partial seizure lasts longer than 15 minutes.
- ♦ The person has breathing difficulties after the jerking stops.
- ♦ The person has diabetes.
- ♦ The person is pregnant and is having tonic clonic seizure.
- ♦ It is the person's first known seizure.

This information is given to provide accurate, general information about epilepsy. Medical information and knowledge changes rapidly and you should consult your doctor for more detailed information. This is not medical advice and you should not make any medication or treatment changes without consulting your doctor.