

New Onset Seizure

Patient and Family Education

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

What is a seizure?

A seizure is an abnormal discharge of electrical activity in the brain. Epilepsy is when someone has 2 or more unprovoked (spontaneous) seizures for no known reason.

- There are many different types of seizures.
- Seizures can last different amounts of time.
- Seizure frequency (how often seizures occur) is different for each child.

What causes seizures?

Seizures may be caused by:

- Infection from a germ or virus.
- Trauma or sudden injury to the head.
- Lack of oxygen to the brain.
- Fever. (A high fever may cause seizures in some children between the ages of 9 months to 5 years. These seizures are called febrile seizures.)
- Reasons that are not known.

What are the possible symptoms?

A seizure often changes how your child looks or acts. Seizures may cause your child to lose consciousness. Some children will not remember that the seizure happened. Other children will remember having the seizure.

Your child may have one or more of these:

- Falling
- Shaking or jerking
- Uncontrollable or involuntary muscle spasms
- Drooling from the mouth
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Staring
- Confusion

What medical tests could my child have?

Your child may not need any tests if he has only had 1 seizure and:

- Recovers completely.
- Does not have any developmental delays.
- Does not have a history of neurological problems (problems with the nervous system).

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

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In some cases, your child may need one or more of these tests:

- Physical exam
- Focused exam of the brain and nervous system. This includes checking the eyes with a flashlight.
- Electroencephalogram (EEG)
- Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)
- Blood tests

Your primary care doctor may refer your child to see a pediatric neurologist if he has had 2 or more seizures. A neurologist is a doctor who cares for people who have problems with the nervous system.

What is the treatment?

Some children do not need any treatment. Your child's doctor will teach you basic seizure precautions in case your child has another seizure.

Sometimes, the doctor will order a rescue (emergency) medicine called Diastat. Diastat is often ordered for children who have had 1 to 2 or more seizures. If ordered, give Diastat:

- Rectally (in your child's bottom).
- As needed for seizures that last longer than 5 minutes.
- As needed for a cluster (back to back) of seizures.
- As instructed by your child's doctor.

Some children need to take medicine to help prevent seizures. Medicine does not cure seizures but it can help prevent injuries caused by seizures. There are many different kinds of seizure medicines. Your child's doctor will order medicine based on:

- Your child's type of seizures.
- Your child's age.
- Possible side effects.

It is very important that your child takes his seizure medicine as ordered. Do not let your child stop taking any medicine without talking with the doctor first.

What should I do if my child has a seizure?

It is hard to know if a child will have a second seizure. About 30% of children with normal test results will have a second seizure. Many children will never have another seizure.

If your child has a seizure:

- Keep calm. Stay with him.
- Move him to a flat surface. Put something soft under his head.
- Remove all hot or sharp objects from the area.
- Loosen tight clothing, especially around his neck.
- Turn him on his side so he does not choke on his saliva or vomit.
- Do not put anything in his mouth. He will not choke on his tongue.
- Do not try to restrain him during a seizure.
- Your child may fall asleep after the seizure. This is called the postictal (post-IC-tal) phase. Do not try to give him food or drink until he is awake and alert.
- Give Diastat (if you have it) if the seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes, and call 911.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

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When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor if:

- He has a second seizure. Your child's doctor may talk with you about the New Onset Seizure Clinic.
- He has a different type of seizure.

Take your child to the emergency room or call 911 if:

- His seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes.
- He has back to back seizures.
- His seizure does not stop after you give Diastat.
- He has trouble breathing.
- He does not return to his usual self after the seizure.

Call 911 right away if your child chokes or does not breathe at all.

If a seizure lasts more than 5 minutes, call 911 or your local ambulance service (or follow your child's doctor's instructions). Ask his doctor if any medicine is needed for emergency use.

Does my child need to follow up with a pediatric neurologist?

- Some children will need to follow up with a pediatric neurologist.
- Some children will only need to follow up with their doctor.
- If your child saw a pediatric neurologist, then his doctor will tell you if you need to follow up with them.
- Please call your child's doctor if you have any questions or concerns.

When can my child return to school or daycare?

Your child can return when:

- He feels well enough to go.
- He looks and acts like his usual self.
- His fever is gone (without using medicines).

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.