



Fair Lawn Nurses

Nurse's Newsletter

EPILEPSY

Epilepsy, sometimes called a seizure disorder, is a medical condition in which people are susceptible to recurring seizures of more than 20 different types. A seizure is a brief episode of disorderly electrical activity in the brain which affects its normal functions and produces changes in a person's movements, behavior, or consciousness. The kind of seizure a person experiences depends on how much, and which part of the brain is affected.

A single seizure may be caused by a number of health conditions. About one person in 100 has recurring seizures, known as epilepsy. Two out of four new cases begin in childhood. Epilepsy in adults may be the result of head injury, often from auto accidents, another medical condition such as uncontrolled diabetes or even a complication of pregnancy. Epilepsy is not contagious at any age.

Recognition of seizures and knowledge of the necessary first aid is important because it is very easy to mistake some seizures for other conditions. A generalized tonic clonic seizure is a convulsion and is what people generally think of when they hear the word "epilepsy". It may look like a heart attack and CPR techniques may be used when they are inappropriate. It may also be interpreted as being drunk or high on drugs.

The generalized tonic clonic seizure usually lasts 2-5 minutes, with complete loss of consciousness and generalized muscle spasms. If the diagnosis of epilepsy is known it is not necessary to call 911 unless: it does not stop after 5 minutes, there is a second seizure, there is difficulty breathing or the person is pregnant.

FIRST AID FOR SEIZURES

- Assist to floor, cushion head, remove glasses
- Loosen tight clothing
- Turn on side

- Note the beginning and end of the seizure
- DO NOT put anything in the mouth
- Look for Medic Alert ID
- Do not hold down

The above information on the tonic clonic seizure, sometimes called grand mal, was highlighted due to the importance of recognizing and instituting first aid in a timely fashion. Another type of seizure, absence or petit mal, has been diagnosed and successfully treated because of an alert teacher. When the only symptoms of a seizure are frequent episodes of staring and unresponsiveness, the teacher is often the first adult to notice.

No first aid is necessary for a petit mal seizure, but if this is the first observation of the seizure, medical evaluation should be advised.

The most common signs of possible seizure activity are:

- Brief staring spells (5-10 seconds) in which the child does not respond to direct attempts to gain his attention
- Periods of confusion
- Sudden loss of muscle tone
- Episodes of rapid blinking, or of the eyes rolling upwards
- Inappropriate movements of the mouth or face, accompanied by a blank expression
- Aimless, dazed behavior, including walking or repetitive movements that seem inappropriate

The above information is from the Epilepsy Foundation, the leading source of authoritative information. They can be reached at (301) 459-3700 or www.epilepsyfoundation.org.