

# What is a Seizure?

A **seizure** is a sudden disruption of the brain's normal electrical activity. During a seizure, a person might experience altered awareness, movement, and/or behavior. **Epilepsy** is a condition characterized by recurrent seizures.

Seizures may look like

- Twitching of an arm or leg
- Loud cry followed by loss of consciousness
- Muscles become rigid for 30 seconds and alternately contract and relax
- Brief loss of consciousness
- Blink, stare blankly, roll eyes or move lips
- Brief involuntary spasms of the tongue or muscles

## Potential causes:

Most seizures are unplanned and disorganized electrical discharges from an area of the brain. Some disease processes as well as injury to the brain can place individuals at risk for having a seizure. After a brain injury, individuals have a great chance of having a seizure because the brain and those signals have been injured.

Seizures can happen at any time - during or after a brain injury, or not at all. Most seizures are benign and do not cause harm. However, if a seizure lasts for 2-5 minutes or longer, complications can occur.

## During a seizure:

### Safety

- Protect the head by padding the area with a pillow or cushion.
- Do NOT restrain. Muscle movements may be strong and constricting them could cause injury.
- Loosen tight clothing.
- Do not leave the person until the seizure is over.

### Position

- If possible, help the person lie down.
- Do not force anything in the mouth, this may cause injury or breathing problems.
- Turn the person's head to the side to help them breathe.



Most seizures will last 15 seconds to several minutes. If a seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes, the individual may stop breathing.



**At Shepherd, call staff for help when the patient has a seizure. At home, if a seizure lasts longer than 2 minutes or the individual stops breathing, call 911 for help.**

## Prevention & Safety

- If anti-convulsant medications are prescribed, continue taking them as instructed and do not stop without speaking to your doctor.
- Wear a medi-alert bracelet. If you experience an aura, find a safe place to lie down until seizure passes.
- Eat a balanced diet.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Get enough sleep.
- Try to control stress.
- Control any fevers.
- Avoid flashing lights, such as strobe lights.
- Use electric razors rather than straight razors for shaving.
- Use shower to bathe rather than bathtub.
- Never swim alone.
- Avoid rough, contact sports.
- Hormonal changes related to pregnancy or menses may increase your chance of having a seizure so be sure to talk to your doctor about these effects as well as how medications may interfere with the effects on pregnancy and oral birth control medications.
- Speak with your doctor about operating any motor vehicles.

