

Epilepsy

What is Epilepsy?

Epilepsy is the tendency to have recurrent seizures. There are many different kinds of epilepsy and around forty different types of seizure. It is a neurological condition, which means that it is to do with the brain and the nervous system. Seizures occur when there is a brief disturbance of the normal activity in the brain. During a seizure, some people may black out, while others experience a number of unusual sensations or movements. Seizures generally last only a few seconds or a few minutes.

Epilepsy can affect anyone at any age. Many people develop epilepsy during childhood and people over the age of 60 are also more likely to develop the condition. For most people with epilepsy there is no known cause. This is called **idiopathic** epilepsy. Other people have **symptomatic** epilepsy which means there is an obvious cause, such as:

- Brain damage caused before, during and after a difficult birth
 - A severe injury to the head
 - A stroke which starves the brain of oxygen
 - An infection to the brain such as meningitis
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Causes of Seizures

Most seizures come without warning, but there are certain factors that can sometimes trigger them. A small number of people with epilepsy are sensitive to flickering light (photosensitive) and may be affected by watching TV or playing video games.

Epilepsy may be affected by hormonal change. In women, seizures may follow a pattern connected with the menstrual cycle. Other factors that may contribute to seizures include:

- Stress, anxiety or excitement
 - Late nights or lack of sleep
 - Drinking alcohol
 - Low blood sugar levels
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Diagnosis

It can be difficult to get a diagnosis of epilepsy. This is because there is no one test which can prove or disprove epilepsy and there are many other possible causes of loss of consciousness.

Since epilepsy is the tendency to have recurrent seizures, your GP may not be able to make a diagnosis if you have only had one. Some people have a single epileptic seizure at some time in their lives but not all go on to develop epilepsy. If your GP suspects epilepsy, you will be referred to a specialist who may arrange a number of tests and investigations to help decide whether you have epilepsy and to identify which type it is.

Treatment

Epilepsy is usually treated with anti-epileptic drugs which work in some way to control seizures. There is a wide choice available and they usually come in tablet or capsule form. Most doctors prefer using just one drug rather than several. Many people with epilepsy can have their seizures controlled well by taking anti-epileptic drugs and some people use [complementary therapies](#) to help control their epilepsy.

You may be eligible for free NHS prescriptions. Check on the [NHS BSA eligibility checker](#).

Local Information and Advice

[The Patient Information Centre](#) offers a range of health related information including;

- medical conditions
- procedures and treatments
- details about self help and support groups
- information about complaints procedures
- copies of leaflets

[Epilepsy Action](#) provide information, guidance and support for people affected by epilepsy including virtual groups that you can join to get peer support.

[Ways to Wellness](#) provide support for people with long term health conditions including epilepsy with a Newcastle GP referral. This support includes link worker to get you involved in local groups and activities, accessing specialist services, support and more.

[Young Epilepsy](#) is a national charity that supports children and young people under 25 with epilepsy in the UK.

Other Useful Organisations

- [Epilepsy Society](#)
- [Healthtalk.org](#)

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Useful Organisations

Patient Information Centre – Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust (CNTW)

Website: www.cntw.nhs.uk

Telephone: 0191 246 7288

Address: St Nicholas Hospital, NE3 3XT

Epilepsy Action

Email: helpline@epilepsy.org.uk

Website: www.epilepsy.org.uk

Telephone: 0191 246 7288

Address: New Anstey House, LS19 7XY

Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Website: <https://www.newcastle-hospitals.nhs.uk>

Telephone: 0191 233 6161

Address: Freeman Hospital, NE7 7DN

healthtalk.org

Email: info@healthtalkonline.org

Website: www.healthtalk.org

Telephone: 0191 233 6161

Epilepsy Society

Website: www.epilepsysociety.org.uk

Telephone: 0191 233 6161

Address: Chesham Lane, SL9 0RJ

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