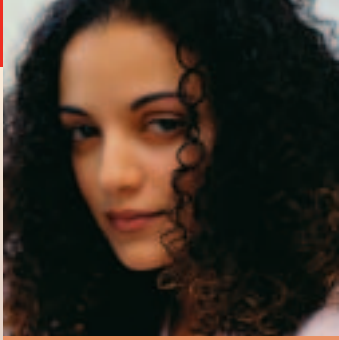
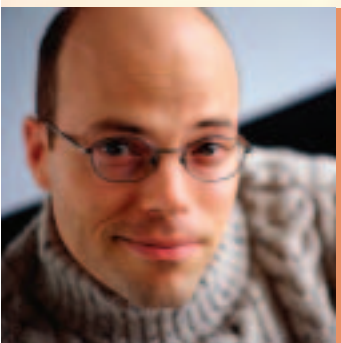


✓ Quick Read Series



True or False?



Fast facts
about
seizures
and epilepsy



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This pamphlet is designed to provide general information about epilepsy to the public. It is not medical advice. People with epilepsy should not make changes in treatment or activities based on this information without first consulting a physician.

MANY MISTAKEN BELIEFS

Lots of people have mistaken beliefs about seizures and epilepsy, beliefs that are hurtful to others.

One reason is that seizures and epilepsy have been around for thousands of years.

Another reason is that seizures can seem strange. Even frightening.

They can make a person fall and shake.

They can make people blank out.

They can make people say things that make no sense, or cry out and run in fear.

For thousands of years, people tried to find ways to make seizures stop.

The result was a mixture of spells, strange substances, and odd beliefs that people thought would protect them from epilepsy and seizures.

And some of them are still around today.

Some of those old ideas and old beliefs make life harder for people living with seizures. That's why we've written this pamphlet.

We want everyone to know what is true about seizures and what is false.

TRUE OR FALSE?

Seizures happen when someone has put a curse on you.

FALSE. That's an idea from long ago, when people did not know that changes in brain cells cause seizures.

It made sense then, but not now.

Now we know, too, that many things can injure the brain and make seizures happen:

- serious injuries to the head
- poisoning
- infections of the brain
- problems before or during birth

Having seizures means that a person is possessed by the devil during the seizure.

FALSE. Again, that is how people used to explain the strange behavior, wandering and muttering that can be part of a seizure.

Today, we know that seizures can be controlled with medicine.

Because seizures can be treated with medicine, it is a disease or disorder just like any other.

Seizures happen when there's an electrical disturbance in the brain.

TRUE. Our brains work because billions of tiny cells fire off electrical signals to each other.

If they all start firing together, a seizure happens.

People with epilepsy and seizures are mentally ill.

FALSE. Epilepsy and mental illness are two different conditions that affect the brain.

Mental illness and epilepsy sometimes happen to the same person, just like epilepsy and arthritis or epilepsy and diabetes, but they're different conditions.

People with epilepsy and seizures are mentally retarded.

FALSE. People with epilepsy and seizures are just like all the rest of us.

Some are very smart. Some are not very smart. And everyone else is in the middle.

Older people are at special risk of seizures and epilepsy.

TRUE. Many things that happen to the brain as we get older can lead to seizures and epilepsy.

Stroke, heart disease, and Alzheimer's can all cause epilepsy.

Seizures can start at any age.

TRUE. People of all ages develop epilepsy.

The only way to treat epilepsy is to take medicine for the rest of your life.

FALSE. Medicine is always tried first. But if it doesn't work to prevent seizures, there are other treatments.

Surgery may work very well for some people.

A device that sends electrical signals to the brain may help others.

A special diet helps children.

If you're not having seizures, you don't have to take the medicine any more.

FALSE. Not having seizures means that the medicine is working.

If you stop taking it, the seizures are likely to come back.

Stress can cause seizures.

TRUE. Some people — not everyone — say they have more seizures when they are stressed.

Lack of sleep and not taking medicine can also trigger seizures.

Epilepsy is not a serious condition, like diabetes. You take a pill and you're fine.

FALSE. Having seizures puts a strain on the body. In some cases they may hurt the brain.

People can get injured when they have seizures.

Children with seizures and people of all ages face major problems, including side effects from drugs, and discrimination in many forms.

If someone in the family has epilepsy, the children will too.

FALSE. Epilepsy can happen when there's no family history at all.

Sometimes children of a parent with epilepsy will have seizures.

But it's far more likely that they will not.

Famous people in history have had epilepsy.

TRUE. Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great and Peter the Great, of Russia, are three great historical leaders who are said to have had epilepsy. And there are many others.

Closer to our own time, painter Vincent Van Gogh and Lewis Carroll, who wrote *Alice in Wonderland*, are also believed to have had seizures.

People with epilepsy and seizures may have trouble getting jobs because of prejudice and discrimination.

TRUE. The old ideas from an earlier time often make it harder for people with seizures to be employed.

The best remedy: to have skills that others want, and to be able to talk about epilepsy in a way that takes away people's fears.

People with epilepsy and seizures can't hold responsible jobs.

FALSE. Many people with epilepsy and seizures are holding important jobs in industries across the country.

Often, their co-workers are not even aware that they have seizures.

You can tell that a person has epilepsy by the way he or she looks.

FALSE. There's no way to tell that someone has epilepsy and seizures just by looking at them.

People are often surprised to learn just how many of their friends and co-workers live with this condition.

A majority of American adults knows someone with epilepsy.

TRUE. A survey showed that six out of ten American adults know someone with epilepsy.

Almost one in three has a close friend or family member with epilepsy.

And one in ten works with someone who has epilepsy.

Epilepsy and seizures are no big deal.

FALSE. It is a very big deal never to know when a seizure will happen.

It is a very big deal never to know whether people will do the right thing if you have a seizure.

It is a big deal to have a condition that other people are afraid of — for whatever reason.

It is a big deal to have a condition that still has so many false beliefs attached to it.

If someone has a seizure, you should put something between their teeth so they won't bite their tongues.

FALSE. Doing that risks injuring a person's teeth or jaw.

You don't want to do anything to hurt someone having a seizure.

If someone has a seizure, you should pry open the mouth and try to hold the tongue down so it can't be swallowed.

FALSE. That would be a dangerous thing to do.

Your fingers could get bitten.

The person having the seizure could choke.

During seizures, people are not at risk of swallowing their tongues.

The safest and best approach is to turn that person gently on one side.

Lying on one side eases breathing and helps to prevent choking.

People with cerebral palsy, autism and mental retardation are more likely than other people to have epilepsy as well.

TRUE. These are all conditions affecting the brain and caused by something in the brain that is not working the way it should.

Epilepsy and seizures are more common among people with these conditions than in the general population.

Epilepsy is rare.

FALSE. About one in every one hundred Americans has epilepsy.

That's about 2.5 million Americans at this date.

Lots of times, people with epilepsy keep it a secret.

TRUE. Think about why that is.

It is because people are worried that others will be afraid of them or reject them.

If the rest of us are more accepting, the need for secrecy will go away.

People with epilepsy may hurt other people during seizures.

FALSE. People with epilepsy are unconscious during many types of seizures.

You can't hurt someone else when you're unconscious.

A person might struggle if held down, but could not deliberately hurt anyone.

People with epilepsy are contagious during seizures. Their saliva is contagious.

FALSE. That's an old idea based on fear.

There's no way in the world you can catch epilepsy from someone else.

When someone has a seizure, you should hold him down to stop the jerking.

FALSE. Holding someone down can tear that person's muscles.

The best thing to do is let the seizure take its course. It will be over in a couple of minutes.

You should always call 911 when someone has a seizure.

FALSE. Not if you know the person has epilepsy and the seizure only lasts a couple of minutes.

You should always call if the person is having a first-ever seizure, or is injured, pregnant, or has diabetes.

Also call if the seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes, or another seizure begins right after the first one ends.

It's hard to find information about epilepsy.

FALSE. You can find information about seizures and epilepsy at your local Epilepsy Foundation.

To find the one nearest you, call 1-800-332-1000 or visit the Foundation's Answer Place at www.epilepsyfoundation.org.

You can also send questions directly to the Foundation by writing:

Epilepsy Foundation
435 I Garden City Drive
Landover, MD 20785

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