

What to do during an epilepsy emergency



Epilepsy is a disorder of the brain that causes seizures. Some seizures are very mild, with barely any symptoms, while others, like the grand mal seizure, can cause a person to fall, shake, and lose awareness of what is happening around them. It is important to know what to do if someone around you has this type of seizure.

Epilepsy first aid basics

Seizures are common. It is estimated that around 1 in 10 people will have one, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This makes it vital that we know how to act when one happens around us.

What to do when someone is having a seizure:

- **Ease the person to the floor** and turn them gently onto their side to help them breathe.
- **Don't restrain their movement** or try hold them down.
- **Put something soft and flat** like a folded jacket under their head.
- **Don't put anything in their mouths.** They will not swallow their tongue. Putting anything in their mouth could cause them to choke, or injure themselves.
- **Don't try give mouth-to-mouth.** People usually start breathing again on their own after a seizure.
- **Make sure the area around them is clear** of anything hard or sharp.
- **Remove glasses and sunglasses** as they may shatter and injure the person seizing.
- **Loosen ties, or scarves, or anything about their necks** that may make it harder to breathe.
- **Check to see if there is an emergency bracelet**

with emergency information that may mean you need to call an ambulance – for instance if they are diabetic, or have heart disease.

- **Keep yourself and those around you calm.**
- **Time the seizure.** Call for an ambulance if it lasts longer than 5 minutes.
- **Don't offer the person water or food** until they are fully alert.

Call for an ambulance if:

- The person is hurt during the seizure.
- The seizure has lasted longer than 5 minutes.
- The person starts having another seizure after the first.
- The seizure occurs while the person is in water.
- The person is pregnant, has heart disease, or is diabetic.

After the seizure

- **Stay with the person until the seizure ends** and they are fully conscious. Afterwards help them to sit somewhere safe.
- **Comfort them and speak calmly.** Once they are more alert and can communicate, gently let them know what happened.
- **Offer to call a loved one** who can make sure they get home safely and/or arrange transport for them to get home and rest.