

- It is estimated 1 or 2 people in every hundred will develop epilepsy, so your child is not alone.
- Epilepsy can begin at any age but often starts early in life.
- There is a good chance that your child's epilepsy can be well controlled.
- Although some people believe it is linked with physical disability or mental handicap, most children with epilepsy will have exactly the same intelligence and abilities as their peers.
- Some do have physical or mental problems as well as seizures which may be linked to brain damage. It is usually the brain damage which has caused epilepsy not the other way round.
- There may be some children who have learning problems and sometimes the medications used to treat epilepsy may cause problems.
- Epilepsy is not contagious.

What are the signs?

It can be difficult to tell. Any one of the following childhood actions could occur and not be related to seizures, but if a parent or care-giver sees a pattern, a medical check up is a good idea. Look for and make note of particular patterns of behaviour if they occur too often to be attributed to chance.

- Sudden falls for no reason
- Lack of response to noise or to spoken words for brief periods daydreaming
- Dazed and confused behaviour
- Unusual sleepiness and irritability when wakened in the morning
- Rhythmic movements of the head (head nodding) or head dropping
- Rapid blinking and staring, upward eye rolling
- Frequent complaints from the child that things look, sound, taste, smell, or feel "funny"; Episodes of fear that have no observable cause
- Clusters of jack-knife movements by babies who are sitting down, accompanied by crying
- Clusters of grabbing movements with both arms by babies lying on their backs
- Sudden stomach pain followed by confusion and sleepiness
- A blank stare followed by chewing, lip smacking, picking at clothes, random movements, unresponsive to surroundings
- Sudden muscle jerks, repeated movements or jerking movements that look out of place or unnatural
- Memory gaps
- Bed wetting
- Waking with a bitten tongue for no apparent reason

Are other conditions mistaken for epilepsy?

Yes, because they may cause effects very similar to those seen in epilepsy. These include:

- breath-holding attacks
- myoclonic jerks of sleep
- migraines
- hyperventilation
- night terrors
- fainting

What causes epilepsy?

In only about 30% of cases the cause can be found. This is called symptomatic or organic epilepsy. These causes in children can include:

- Trauma to the foetus during pregnancy or birth (lack of oxygen)
- Poisoning (lead poisoning, environmental contaminants)
- Brain infection, meningitis, encephalitis, brain abscesses
- Head trauma (car accident or blow to the head)
- Blood chemical abnormalities, e.g. low calcium, magnesium or glucose
- Hereditary disease, e.g. tuberose sclerosis
- Febrile convulsions
- Congenital malformation of the brain
- Tumors (rarely in children)

The remaining 70% of people with epilepsy have idiopathic epilepsy, which means there is no known cause, but is presumed to be more widespread chemical changes in the brain, the nature of which is unknown. In approximately 30% of these cases the epilepsy is thought to be inherited and includes especially some of the childhood generalised epilepsies.

References:

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