

## Absence Seizures

The entire brain is involved. The child loses consciousness for a few seconds, motor activity ceases and they have a blank stare. It may look as if the child is daydreaming. They recover immediately and without confusion and abruptly resume mental and physical activity. These seizures are brief, subtle and difficult to recognize. They can look like 'daydreaming' and may occur frequently, therefore they are likely to interfere with the child's activities and teachers and carers need to be told. Absence seizures usually respond well to medications.

**Duration:** Usually only 2 to 10 seconds (sometimes longer).

### First Aid

- Recognise that a seizure has occurred.
- Repeat any information that the child may have missed.

## Tonic-Clonic Seizures

Electrical activity instantly involves the entire brain and consciousness is lost immediately.

**Tonic Phase:** The child will suddenly become stiff, unconscious, and if standing fall to the floor. They may let out a loud cry as the muscles in the chest contract and the air rushes between the vocal cords. The face and lips may go blue (cyanosis) because it is difficult for the child to breathe. Sometimes saliva can cause a gurgling sound in the throat. The child may bite the tongue or inside of the cheek, which can cause bleeding. Increased pressure in the bladder and bowel may cause wetting or soiling.

**Lasts** approx 30 seconds.

**Clonic Phase:** The extremities will jerk rhythmically. Saliva that has not been swallowed during the attack may cause frothing at the mouth. Breathing recommences but is irregular as the respiratory muscles are still affected, cyanosis lessens.

**Lasts** 30 seconds to 5 minutes.

**Recovery phase:** Movement ceases, the child is pale and limp. They will need to rest and it may be difficult to wake them or get any response during this time. They may have a headache and sore muscles once they regain consciousness and usually want to sleep for minutes or hours. The child will have no memory of the seizure.

**Duration:** Usually lasts 1 to 3 minutes but may last up to 5 minutes or longer (see **status epilepticus**, page 9).

### First Aid

**Do not** restrain the child. **Do not** insert anything in the mouth.

1. Keep calm.
2. Note the time.
3. Protect the child from further injury.
4. Roll the child onto their side to clear the airway (recovery position).
5. Talk gently to the child after the seizure, offer reassurance. Stay with them until they are fully recovered.

**Call an ambulance if:** the seizure activity lasts for more than 5 minutes; if the child has lost consciousness for more than 5 minutes; if one seizure follows another; or the child is injured or you are in any doubt.

## Tonic seizure (drop attack)

Consciousness is lost and there is sudden stiffening of the child's whole body as the muscles tighten. If standing when the seizure occurs the child will fall over. There are no convulsions and recovery is quick.

**Duration:** Usually only a few seconds

### First Aid

1. Put the child in a safe position.
2. Treat any injuries and check for **concussion**.  
**Signs of concussion may be:**
  - Recovery time after seizure is much longer than usual
  - Pattern of recovery is different from usual
  - Prolonged weakness on one side of the body
  - Behaviour that is unusually excited or restless
  - Clear fluid escaping from the nose or ear
3. Explain what has happened and help them to recover as with a tonic clonic seizure.

## Atonic (drop attack)

Opposite to tonic. The child's body loses all muscle tone and collapses to the floor. There are no convulsions and the child is unconscious throughout the attack.

**Duration:** Lasts only seconds

**First Aid** As for tonic seizures above

## Myoclonic (muscle jerk)

The arms head and sometimes the whole body suddenly jerk and the child will lose consciousness for that brief moment. If the child is standing up when the seizure occurs they may be thrown off balance. Myoclonic seizures often occur in the morning within the first few hours of waking.

**Duration:** Brief, seconds

### First Aid

1. Reassure the child
2. If they have fallen, check for injuries.

## CALL AN AMBULANCE IF:

- ✓ The seizure activity lasts for more than 5 minutes
- ✓ The child has lost consciousness for more than 5 minutes
- ✓ The person has not begun to recover from a complex partial seizure in 10 – 15 minutes
- ✓ A seizure occurs in water
- ✓ The child is injured, or has diabetes
- ✓ One seizure follows another
- ✓ A management plan indicates an ambulance should be called
- ✓ There are any signs of concussion
- ✓ You are in any doubt.