

Living With Seizures

Lots of very normal people have seizures.

Now that seizures are a part of your—or your loved one's—life, there are some important things you should know.

CAN PEOPLE WITH SEIZURES LEAD NORMAL LIVES?

Millions of people with seizures do. In fact, seizures are much more common than most people think. Many prominent celebrities, as well as many of the people you pass on the street, live with controlled seizures. People whose seizures are controlled can be outstanding students, capable parents, champion athletes, and excellent workers, managers, and professionals. In short, they can enjoy almost all activities that others do.

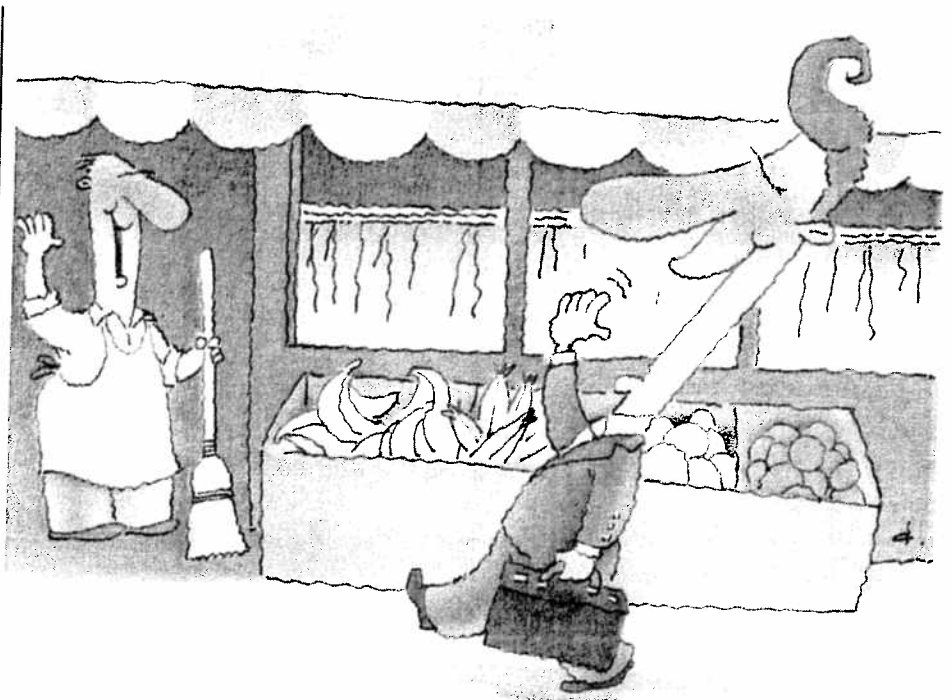
WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE WITH SEIZURES AVOID DOING?

It's best to avoid any activity that would be dangerous to themselves or to others if a seizure should happen. Flying a plane and rock climbing are obvious examples.

Some activities can be pursued under carefully considered circumstances. For example, someone with seizures should swim only if seizures are controlled—and never alone. Driving a car is usually allowed only after a person has been free of seizures for a period of time.

WHAT IS A SEIZURE?

A seizure is something like an electrical short circuit in the brain. When a seizure occurs, it may cause convulsions, lapses of consciousness, spasms,



Illustrations: Jack Desrocher

strange sensations, blackouts, or a combination of these symptoms.

WHAT KINDS OF SEIZURES ARE THERE?

Seizures are grouped into two types: partial and generalized, each with several subgroups. Some seizures may be momentary lapse spells, while others may involve twitching, jerking, or rigidity of the body or a particular part of it. Some seizures cause a temporary but abrupt loss of consciousness, while others may occur without a complete blackout.

Most people who have seizures have the same kind each time. Providing a

description of what happens, in combination with a brain wave test (electroencephalogram, or EEG), will usually help a physician identify the type quite clearly.

WHY DO SEIZURES HAPPEN?

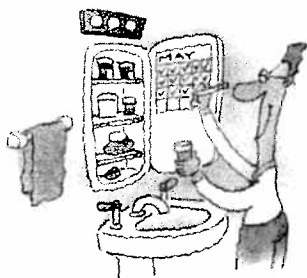
Sometimes the underlying cause is obvious. Common "triggers" include a high fever, a bump on the head, an infection, pressure on the brain, or a temporary chemical imbalance. Frequently, seizures occur for no understandable reason. Actually, as complicated as the brain is, it's amazing that such "short circuits" don't happen more often.

WHAT SHOULD FAMILY MEMBERS OR FRIENDS DO IF A SEIZURE OCCURS?

- Stay calm. It might help to know that the seizure is usually much harder on family members or friends than on the person having the seizure.
- Turn the person's head to the side to prevent choking.
- Do not allow anyone to put anything in the person's mouth, including drinks. Don't try to stop the seizure by restraining, by shaking, or by pouring water on the person.
- Provide comfort after a seizure. A person may be confused and/or disoriented.
- Seek medical attention when a seizure happens for the first time, if it seems different from a previous seizure, or if it is prolonged.

CAN MEDICATIONS CURE A SEIZURE PROBLEM?

Medications do not cure seizures, but medications can *control* seizures in most people who have them so that they seldom, if ever, occur.



WHAT HAPPENS IF A DOSE IS MISSED?

If seizure medicine isn't taken, blood levels of the drug could drop to a dangerous level. Missing a dose doesn't always cause a seizure, but keep in mind that some people may have a seizure when they do miss a dose.

So be sure to keep a supply of medication with a seizure patient at all times. And set up a routine so it is easy to remember every dose. A check-off calendar or compartmentalized pillbox may be helpful. Check medication supplies before the end of each day, before each weekend, and before holidays and trips. Always get refills promptly so you don't run out.

HOW LONG ARE MEDICATIONS USUALLY CONTINUED?

A person generally takes medications until there have been no seizures for an extended time—depending on the type of seizure, the history of past seizures, and other information such as the EEG status.



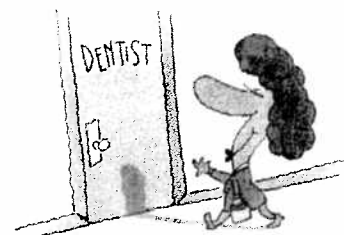
DO SEIZURE MEDICATIONS HAVE SIDE EFFECTS?

All medications, even simple over-the-counter ones, have the possibility of causing side effects in some people. However, the benefits of controlling seizures usually far outweigh the possible problems associated with medication.

But along with the help Dilantin provides, it can commonly cause the annoying side effect of swelling of the gums. So it's especially important to practice good dental hygiene and gum care (which includes regular dental visits). This means more than a few

strokes of a toothbrush. Microbial plaque must be regularly scrubbed off of teeth and gums to help prevent gum irritation and swelling.

If your gums become swollen or tender, follow these steps:



- Schedule a dental checkup right away so the plaque deposits that have already formed can be removed.
- Prevent plaque from building up and remove light deposits of it by thorough tooth brushing and flossing after every meal and snack.
- Ask your dentist to recommend an antiplaque mouthwash, and use it at least twice a day.
- Schedule and keep follow-up dental visits every 3 months for plaque cleaning and checkups.

WHAT ELSE IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW?

Follow through with the instructions of a knowledgeable physician, and avoid misguided and unproven "cures."

While taking anticonvulsant medications, avoid alcoholic beverages or other drugs unless you have first consulted your doctor. And be sure to report any new problems that come up—such as a rash, insomnia, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, bruising, or anything that is a concern for you.