

# Overview - Epilepsy

Epilepsy is a neurological condition: disturbances to the brain's normal electrical activity cause seizures or episodes of altered consciousness. Seizures don't last long - a few seconds to a few minutes - and can be frequent or intermittent. Seizure symptoms range from muscle stiffness or jerkiness to loss of muscle tone and can cause a person to fall to the ground. Loss of consciousness is common.

Seizures are unpredictable but certain outside triggers make them more likely: stress, high alcohol intake, use of street drugs, tiredness, flickering lights, menstruation, antidepressant/antipsychotic medication, low blood sugar (e.g. from skipping meals). Epilepsy can be well-managed by medication, leaving a person seizure-free.

## **Students may experience the following types of seizures:**

- Tonic-clonic: the body stiffens, the student loses consciousness and falls to the floor. Their limbs jerk and they can lose control of the bladder or bowels.
- Temporal lobe: the student will lose consciousness and behave strangely perhaps mumbling, experiencing odd sensations or wandering aimlessly.
- Absence: the student will be unconscious and zone out for a few seconds.
- Tonic: the body stiffens and the student will fall over if not supported. Such seizures often happen during sleep.
- Atonic or drop attacks: the student loses muscle tone and drops to the floor. The seizure is very brief and the student is usually able to get up again immediately afterwards. They could be at risk of head injuries from falling forwards.
- Myoclonic: the student's arms or whole body may jerk uncontrollably for a few seconds and can result in accidents such as spilled drinks.



## Top tips for teaching students with epilepsy:

- Discuss with the student how they are affected by epilepsy and how they would like you to deal with any seizures that may occur.
- Ensure sunlight/electric light glare off whiteboards is minimised or rearrange seating so the student is not exposed to it.
- Be mindful that computer screens or some forms of lighting can trigger a seizure.
- Be ready to provide tutorials to compensate for missed learning in taught sessions.
- Be ready to arrange a technician's support if the student needs it when using machinery and equipment.
- Offer advice to keep a student from getting stressed about academic tasks: support her/him to pace academic tasks and to have reasonable expectations of achievement.

### Useful links

- General epilepsy info: <https://patient.info/health/epilepsy-and-seizures>
- Life at university with epilepsy:  
<http://learn.epilepsy.org.uk/stories/education-christinas-story/>
- Online training on what to do if someone has a seizure:  
[https://learn.epilepsy.org.uk/ld2014/wp-content/uploads/articulate\\_uploads/What\\_to\\_do\\_if\\_someone\\_has\\_a\\_seizure/story.html](https://learn.epilepsy.org.uk/ld2014/wp-content/uploads/articulate_uploads/What_to_do_if_someone_has_a_seizure/story.html)

