# Patient Information Sheet for suspected first seizure/new epilepsy

You have been given this information sheet because your doctor suspects that you may have had a seizure, or developed epilepsy. The diagnosis of a seizure or epilepsy is not always straightforward, so you will be referred to a specialist epilepsy clinic for a further assessment and advice. You will usually be seen within 2-4 weeks. You will be given more information and a detailed explanation when you come to the clinic, but in the meantime, even if you have already been started on treatment, there are some safety precautions listed below that are advisable, while you might be at risk of further attacks.

## First aid for seizures

Seizure First Aid describes what to do (or not do) in the event a family member or friend has a seizure. Do not panic. Most seizures stop on their own after one to two minutes.

* If the person is falling, help them to the ground and cushion their head.
* Do not place anything in their mouth.
* Do not restrain the convulsive movements.
* After a seizure, roll the person onto their left side, and if breathing is still laboured check nothing is blocking the throat (e.g. dentures).

If a seizure lasts more than 5 minutes, if they have multiple seizures or are unmanageable after a seizure, call an ambulance.

After they have recovered, if you don’t already have a treatment plan, inform your GP that another attack has occurred and seek advice on what to do next.

## Safety precautions.

During a seizure, a person may injure himself or herself. Seizure precautions are guidelines that a person can follow in order to minimize the risk of injury during a seizure. For any activity, it is important to ask, "What would happen if I had a seizure while doing this?"

* To avoid accidental drowning, a person with seizures may want to have a shower instead of a bath. Swimming is okay, but never swim alone and tell the lifeguard you have epilepsy.
* If possible, cook when someone else is nearby. Use the back burners of the stove and shatterproof containers to prevent accidental burns.
* Avoid working on ladders, roofs or scaffolding or with power tools e.g. chain saws, or manufacturing equipment.
* Never use electrical equipment near water.
* When taking public transportation like the bus or train, stay clear of the platform edge.

## Driving

You **must not drive** at all at least until you have been seen in the clinic. Unless another treatable cause of your attack(s) is found, you are required by law to inform the DVLA, and will not be allowed to drive for at least 6 months, and more commonly 1 year from your most recent seizure. Failure to inform the DVLA is a criminal offence, and you can be fined up to £1000.

DVLA Telephone : 0300 790 6806 https://[www.gov.uk/driving-medical-conditions](http://www.gov.uk/driving-medical-conditions)

# General Information

**What is a seizure?** - A seizure (sometimes called a fit, an attack, a convulsion or a turn) is a sudden, brief disruption of normal brain activity. The brain is made up of nerve cells that communicate by electrical signals. When there is abnormal and excessive electrical activity in the brain, a seizure occurs. This causes changes in awareness, behaviour and/or abnormal movement. Fortunately, this activity usually lasts only a few seconds to minutes.

**Are all collapses caused by seizures?** No, non-epileptic seizures can be caused by other conditions such as a low blood sugar, a fainting spell, or an anxiety attack.

**What is epilepsy?** - Epilepsy refers to a condition in which a person has a risk of repeated seizures. Not everyone who has had a seizure has epilepsy. There is no cure for epilepsy but most cases can be managed well with medication.

**What symptoms can occur during a seizure?** - One of the most common seizure types is a convulsion. This may be called a "tonic clonic" or "grand mal" seizure. In this type of seizure, a person may stiffen and have jerking muscle movements; during the muscle jerking, the person may bite their tongue, causing bleeding or frothing at the mouth or may lose bladder control. Other seizure types are less dramatic. Shaking movements may be isolated to one arm or part of the face. Alternatively, the person may suddenly stop responding and stare for a few seconds, sometimes with chewing motions or smacking of their lips. Seizures may also cause "sensations" that only the patient feels. For example, stomach discomfort, fear, or an unpleasant smell. Such subjective feelings are commonly referred to as auras. A person usually experiences the same symptoms with each seizure aura. Sometimes, a seizure aura can occur before a convulsive seizure.

**What can trigger a seizure?** - Some people have seizure triggers, such as flashing lights. Other factors can also increase the likelihood that a seizure will happen. For example, drinking alcohol, recreational drug use, fevers, menstrual periods, a lack of sleep, and stress can all increase the risk of seizures in some people.

**What causes epilepsy?** – Some people are born with a genetic tendency towards epilepsy. Epilepsy can also be seen following a head injury, an infection of the brain or a stroke.

**What are antiepileptic drugs?** – These are drugs which reduce the risk of further seizures by blocking abnormal electrical activity in the brain. They must be taken every day to be effective. If a diagnosis of epilepsy is made, and you are treated with antiepileptic drugs, you are entitled to free prescriptions. You will need to get a Prescription Charge Exemption Certificate (FP92). You can pick up an application form from your doctor, hospital or pharmacist. Oral contraception (and other tablets) may need to taken at different doses if antiepileptic drugs are taken. Check with your GP or hospital doctor if in doubt. If you are taking tablets you should keep an up to date and complete list in your wallet, and bring them to any clinic appointment.

**Where can I get further information? -** Once you have been seen in the first seizure clinic, they will be able to provide you with any further information and address any questions you may have. Further information is also available at:

* Epilepsy Action [www.epilepsy.org.uk](http://www.epilepsy.org.uk/) (helpline 0808 8005050)
* Epilepsy Society [www.epilepsysociety.org.uk](http://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk/) (helpline 01494-601400)