Your first Seizure

What is a seizure?

A seizure, fit or convulsion are all terms used to describe abnormal electrical activity in your brain. People with a seizure typically have synchronised jerking movements of arms, legs and body. Less commonly people may experience localised twitching or unusual eye movements. Strange feelings or sensations may be experienced before the seizure.

People are often not aware of what is happening when they have a seizure.

There are many different types of seizures. The cause is often not known. A first seizure does not mean that you will go on to have epilepsy.

Some seizures develop as a result of brain injury or illness. Other seizures may be the result of medications or drugs, due to withdrawal from alcohol or other drugs, due to low blood sugar or even extreme electrolyte abnormalities.

Young children may have seizures if they have a fever, but very few children with a first seizure go on to have epilepsy.

Why did I have this seizure now?

Some people are more prone to seizures than others. A lack of sleep or a debilitating illness may precipitate a seizure. It is important to tell your doctor about any drugs or medications you are using, particularly if there has been a recent change.

What happens now?

If this is your first seizure, your doctor will examine you thoroughly to make sure your nervous system is working correctly. Then you will usually require blood tests and a brain scan. If these are okay you may be able to go home. (Note: brain scans are not always immediately available in smaller centres, but it is okay if the scan is done within the next few days). A brain scan could either be a CT scan or an MRI scan. Your doctor will decide this with you.

Certain more detailed tests are also required such as an EEG (Electro Encephalogram). An EEG is a graphical record of electrical activity of the brain. These are usually done as an outpatient, typically within 48 hours of your seizure.

Your doctor should arrange for you to see a Seizure Clinic or Neurologist who specialises in dealing with seizure disorders.

Medications to prevent further seizures are rarely started after a first seizure. Medications are usually only started if you have a second seizure, or if there was something particular in your past history, examination or test results.



Is there anything I can't do now?

You cannot drive or operate heavy or dangerous machinery until you have had your appointment with the Neurologist and been cleared to do so. By law, you will need certification that you are safe to drive.

Swimming and taking a bath alone are not recommended and special care needs to be taken when using hot water. Turning on the cold tap first in the shower or basin and lowering the temperature of the hot water are good safety hints for any home. Showers baths and running water in any context, appear to be conducive to seizures in some people.

If you have another seizure before getting your tests or seeing the Neurologist or Seizure Clinic go immediately to the Emergency Department.

What other risks are there?

If you are reading this then seizures are new to you. You should take extra care until you and your doctors know more about your condition.

Your home, work and leisure activities may present some risks. Ask yourself "could I be hurt by a seizure occurring in this situation?" If so, avoid it for now.

If you have an ongoing seizure disorder, it is important to know that you should be able to control the risk and get back to a normal life. Most people get control of their seizures within a year.

More information can be found at www.epilepsy.org.au