
Seizures

What is a seizure?

A seizure is a sudden surge of electrical activity in the brain that affects how a person feels or acts for a short time. On rare occasions, a seizure may last for an extended period of time. Before the onset of some seizures, there may be warning signs. A person may have a sense that something is wrong (have a strange feeling, tingling), and sometimes seizures come with no warnings. A seizure can affect people in different ways; some may be barely noticed, while others may cause the person to have uncontrolled movements of the body. Seizure activity may cause the person to fall to the floor or even become unconscious (pass out). After a seizure, the person may be very sleepy. This may last for a few seconds to minutes to hours.

There can be many potential causes of seizures based on the person's medical condition, a disease process, prior head injury, infections, medications, or fever. Seeing someone have a seizure can be a frightening experience. Try to remain calm.

What are the signs and symptoms?

The person having a seizure may have some or none of these signs:

- Muscle jerking / twitching (convulsion)
- Stiffening of the body
- Unable to awaken for a period of time
- Loss of bladder control
- Blurred vision
- Inability to speak / difficulty talking
- Eyes rolling back
- Sudden confusion or memory loss
- Recurring movements – chewing, lip smacking, clapping
- Blank staring or blinking

What can be done for the person having a seizure?

- **Safety is the first concern**
- Keep the person free from injury – remove any objects that the person may fall on or bump into
- Turn the person on his/her side if vomiting occurs, or when the seizure ends
- It is important not to restrain the person. Do not attempt to place any objects in the mouth. Do not feed him/her until he/she is fully awake/alert
- If possible, gently support the head by placing a pillow under the head
- Give medications as instructed

What to report to the hospice/palliative care team

Please call if this was a first seizure, if it was different from a previous seizure, or if the seizure lasts for a prolonged period of time.

(Please note – it is important to stay with the person during the seizure.)

- Report any of the above signs or symptoms, what has happened during the seizure, what body parts were involved, how long it lasted, and how the person acted after the seizure. For example, did they lose consciousness or bladder control, or have any body twitching?
- Report any injury
- Report if any prescribed medications have been missed

Conclusion/summary

Ask the nurse if there may be anything that could help lessen or prevent a seizure such as medication or an activity

- Safety is the first concern for the person having the seizure
- Do not attempt to restrain the person or put any object in his/her mouth
- Report as much detail as you can about the seizure incident to the hospice/palliative care team
- Try to remain calm

Other HPNA Teaching Sheets on are available at www.HPNA.org.

Reference

Core Curriculum for the Generalist Hospice and Palliative Nurse. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company; 2010.

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