

Epileptic seizure

First aid⁺

Anyone can help a person who has an epileptic seizure



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An epileptic seizure is caused by a transient disorder of the electric activity of the brain.

A seizure disturbs the normal behavior of the person. The symptoms of the seizure depend on the location of the deviating electric discharge in the brain. The most common types of seizures which require immediate treatment are seizures with convulsions and seizures with impaired awareness.

Seizures usually last only a few minutes and pass by themselves. If a seizure is prolonged or recurs so soon that the person does not fully recover in between, one should call the emergency number 112.

Some people with epilepsy carry a necklace or a bracelet indicating that they have epilepsy.



Anyone can help a person who has an epileptic seizure. No special skills are required to provide first aid.



Seizures with convulsions and loss of consciousness

The person loses consciousness, falls and his body stiffens. He may bite his tongue or cheek resulting in bleeding from the mouth. The stiffening is followed by jerks. Breathing may be paused for a few seconds and saliva or foam may flow from the mouth. After the seizure the person is usually tired and may sleep but can, however, be waked up.

1. Remain calm.
2. Do not attempt to prevent the convulsions, but make sure that the person does not hit his head (place for example a cushion under the head) or otherwise injure himself. Seizures usually last only 1–2 minutes.
3. Do not place anything in the mouth, as it will hamper breathing.
4. Place the person on his side as soon as the convulsions tail off. This way, the airways will remain open and saliva and foam come out of the mouth.
5. Make sure that the person is able to breathe freely, and you can feel the air flow.
6. Call the emergency number if the seizure lasts more than 5 minutes or the seizure recurs before the person has recovered from the previous seizure. If you do not know whether the person has epilepsy, call the emergency number 112 after the first aid.
7. Make sure that the person has not injured himself and has recovered fully, can answer questions and knows where he is going before leaving him. Call the emergency number if the person is breathing poorly, has not recovered or has injured himself during the seizure.

Seizures with impaired awareness

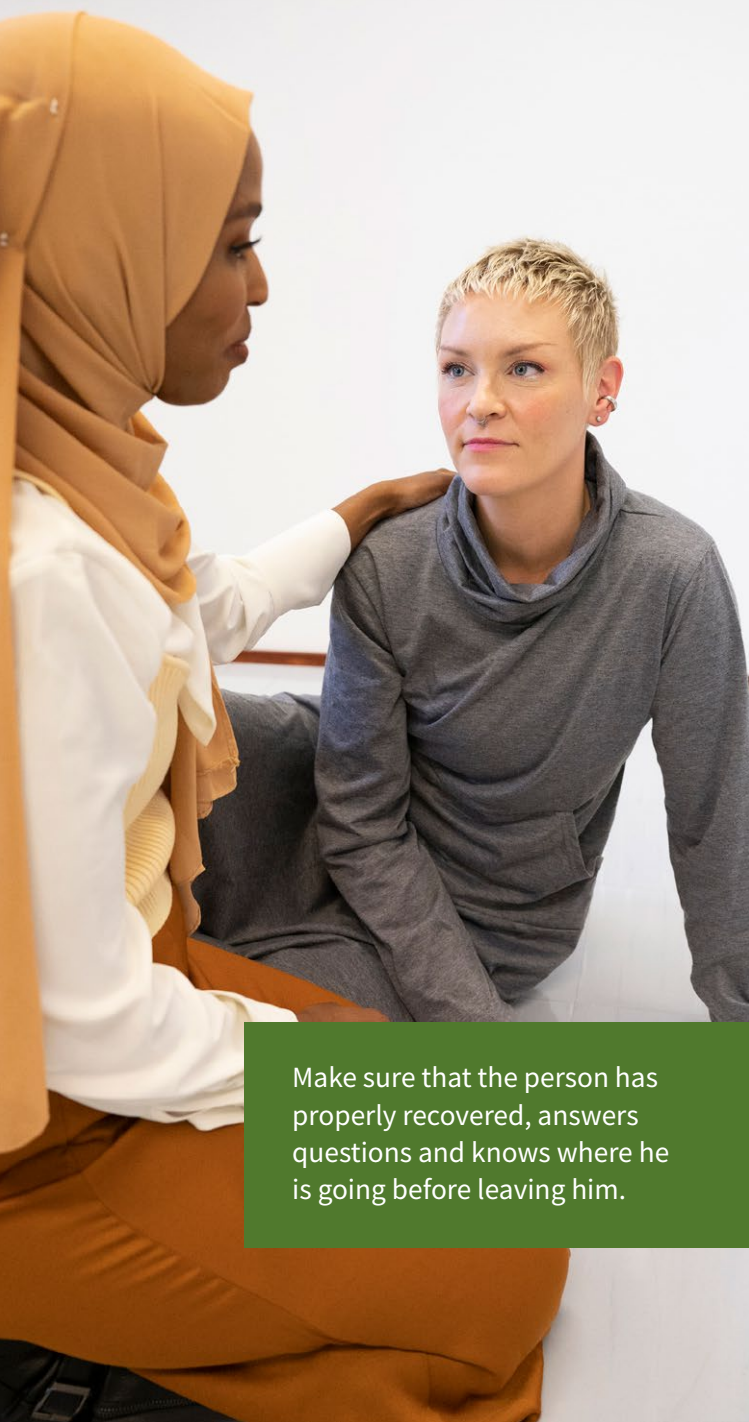
During the seizure, the person may be confused and is not fully aware of his surroundings. He may repeat the same mechanical movement, for example, walk aimlessly, rub his hands, pick at his clothes or smack his lips. He seems not to understand what is happening and cannot answer questions properly.

1. Remain close to the person and, if necessary, try to guide him in such a way that he does not harm himself. A seizure will usually last only a few minutes.
2. Do not try to prevent the person from moving, as he is likely to resist you.
3. Allow the seizure to pass by itself. If it does not stop within 5 minutes, call the emergency number.
4. Make sure that the person has properly recovered, answers questions and knows where he is going before leaving him.

Call the emergency number if the person has injured himself during the seizure.

If you are not sure what to do, call the emergency number

112



Make sure that the person has properly recovered, answers questions and knows where he is going before leaving him.

Emergency medication for prolonged seizures

A vast majority (> 90 %) of epileptic seizures pass by themselves within 1 to 4 minutes. They do not require any specific action or special medical treatment at the scene. Epilepsy is treated with long term preventative medication which is enhanced if a person still has seizures regardless of the medication.

Epileptic seizures are considered to be prolonged if they last more than 5 minutes or if they recur before the person has recovered from the previous seizure. If a person is prone to have prolonged seizures, emergency medication may be prescribed. The emergency medications used are diazepam enemas and midazolam solutions to be administered to the inner cheek. The medication is prescribed by a doctor and the correct use of the emergency medication is instructed by the doctor or the nurse.

The emergency medication should be given only by somebody who knows how to give the medication properly, who knows the person who is having the seizure and knows the instructions when to give the emergency medication. This person can be, for example, a family member, worker in a day care or school or in a nursing home.

If the seizure continues after the emergency medication, the emergency number 112 should be called and the person should be taken to a hospital.

Emergency medication is not prescribed for persons whose epilepsy is in good control. If seizures reappear after a long seizure free period, it is best that the person contacts his doctor for checking of the long-term medication.

60,000 Finns have been diagnosed with epilepsy and 36,000 need regular epilepsy medication. 5,000 Finnish children have epilepsy.

Epilepsy may have onset at any age, most commonly in early childhood or in the elderly. Annually, about 3,000 people start to take anti-epileptic medication, 800 of whom are under 15 years of age.

Epilepsy is a long-term illness and the treatment is often lifelong.



Malmin kauppatie 26

FI-00700 Helsinki, Finland

+358 9 350 8230

epilepsialiitto@epilepsia.fi

www.epilepsia.fi