

This factsheet lists some interesting facts about epilepsy. If you would like more information about epilepsy, please contact the Epilepsy Information Services department (see back page for details).

Did you know...?

- Epilepsy is a neurological condition - which means it affects the brain. It is also a physical condition, because the body is affected when someone has a seizure.
- Epilepsy is described as the tendency to have repeated seizures that start in the brain. Epilepsy is usually only diagnosed after the person has had more than one seizure.
- The Greek philosopher Hippocrates (460-377 BC) was the first person to think that epilepsy starts in the brain.
- Anyone can have a seizure if the circumstances are right, but most people do not have seizures under 'normal conditions'.
- Seizures are sometimes called 'fits' or 'attacks'. Seizures happen when there is a sudden interruption in the way the brain normally works.
- Epilepsy is a variable condition that affects different people in different ways.
- There are many different types of seizures (over 40). What seizures look like can vary. For example someone may go 'blank' for a couple of seconds, they may wander around and be quite confused, or they may fall to the ground and shake (convulse). So not all seizures involve convulsions.
- Some people are not aware during their seizures and so they do not remember what happens to them. It can be really useful to have a description of what happened from someone who saw their seizure to help with diagnosis. This is sometimes called an 'eyewitness account'.
- There are many different reasons (causes) why someone might develop epilepsy. Sometimes a cause for epilepsy can be found (for example if someone has had a head injury) but sometimes the person's epilepsy starts 'out of the blue' and the cause cannot be found.
- Epilepsy can start at any age, and it is often diagnosed in people under 20 and people over 60. This is because some causes are more common in young people (such as difficulties at their birth, childhood infections or accidents) and in older people (such as strokes that lead to epilepsy). For some people their epilepsy might 'go away' and they stop having seizures. This is called spontaneous remission.
- Epilepsy can be difficult to diagnose and there are a number of different tests that might be done to help with diagnosis such as an EEG (Electroencephalogram) or an MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging).
- Epilepsy is usually treated with medication called anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs). AEDs aim to stop seizures from happening, but they do not cure epilepsy.
- With the right AEDs, up to 70% of people with epilepsy could have their seizures controlled (stopped).
- The first AED used to treat epilepsy was phenobarbitone in 1912. There are now over 20 different AEDs available in the UK.

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Monday – Friday 10am – 4pm (national call rate)

- For people who do not have their seizures controlled with AEDs, surgery may be an option. This can involve removing the part of their brain that causes the seizures.
- Some people may have a form of treatment called Vagus Nerve Stimulation to help control their epilepsy. This involves having a special device implanted that sends regular electrical signals to their brain.
- St Valentine is the patron saint of people with epilepsy.
- Some famous people who have had epilepsy include the Roman Emperor Julius Caesar and the artist Vincent Van Gogh. More recently the actor Danny Glover, Rabbi Lionel Blue, publicist Max Clifford and rugby player Dean Ryan.

Epilepsy statistics

- One in 20 people will have a one-off epileptic seizure at some point in their life (although this does not necessarily mean that they have epilepsy).
- One in 50 people will have epilepsy at some time in their life (not everyone with epilepsy will have it for life).
- Around 75 people are diagnosed with epilepsy every day.
- There are around 456,000 people in the UK who have epilepsy. That's about one in every 131 people. There are around 50 million people with epilepsy in the world.
- Only about 3-5% of people with epilepsy will be affected by flashing lights (called photosensitive epilepsy).

Usually when someone has an epileptic seizure there is no need to call an ambulance. However, you should always call 999 for an ambulance if:

- **it is the person's first seizure;**
- **they have injured themselves badly;**
- **they have trouble breathing after the seizure has stopped;**
- **they have one seizure after another without recovering in between;**
- **the seizure lasts two minutes longer than is usual for them (if you know how long their seizures usually last); or**
- **the seizure lasts more than 5 minutes if you do not know how long their seizures usually last.**

To become an associate member call 01494 601 402 or email members@epilepsysociety.org.uk
For a fundraising pack call 01494 601 300 or email fundraising@epilepsysociety.org.uk

Epilepsy Information Services National Society for Epilepsy

Chesham Lane, Chalfont St. Peter, Bucks SL9 0RJ
www.epilepsysociety.org.uk

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