

# What to do when someone has a seizure

In this leaflet Phil Tittensor, an epilepsy specialist nurse in Stafford, outlines what you should – and shouldn't – do when you see someone having a seizure.



Phil Tittensor

## Knowing what to do – and what not to do – when someone has a seizure is vital.

The help required depends on:

- the type and pattern of seizure
- how long the seizure lasts and how severe it is
- how the seizure affects the person's consciousness

Most seizures are self-righting. Some may require basic first aid, while others, e.g. serial seizures and status epilepticus\*, may require emergency medical attention. Reassurance and appropriate support are always helpful to someone who is having a seizure.

## What to do if a person has:

### A focal seizure with awareness fully retained

(this is sometimes called a simple focal seizure):

- Guide the person away from any immediate danger
- Be understanding and reassuring
- If a tonic clonic seizure develops, follow the first aid directions on the next page

### A focal seizure with awareness reduced or lost

(this is sometimes called a complex focal seizure):

- Don't restrain or try to distract the person
- Gently guide them away from any immediate danger
- Keep them under observation until they recover
- If a tonic clonic seizure develops, follow the first aid directions on the next page

### An absence seizure

- Guide the person away from any immediate danger
- They may have missed important information – check this

### A tonic, atonic and myoclonic seizure

- Check the person for injury, and give them first aid if needed – see below
- Stay with the person until they have recovered and reassure them

### A tonic clonic (major convulsive) seizure

- See first aid guidance on the next page

\*Status epilepticus is a condition in which seizures persist for 30 minutes or more. It can occur with all types of seizure, but with tonic clonic seizures it is a medical emergency requiring immediate medical treatment. If a tonic clonic seizure lasts more than five minutes, or if a second seizure occurs before the person has recovered, call for medical help.

For a fuller description of seizure types, see our leaflet entitled 'What is epilepsy?'



## The recovery position

First make sure that the unconscious person can breathe and gently tilt their head back. Then follow the four steps shown to place them in the recovery position.

**DO NOT USE THIS METHOD IF YOU THINK THAT THE UNCONSCIOUS PERSON MAY HAVE DAMAGE TO THE NECK, BACK OR ANY PART OF THE SPINE.**

**Step one:** Move the person's arm that's closest to you out to the side, so that it forms a right angle.



**Step two:** Place the palm of the person's far hand on their opposite cheek, and bend their far leg so that it's at a right angle to their body. Then gently roll the person towards you onto their side.



**Step three:** Adjust the leg and hand positions as shown. Ensure that the person's head is still tilted back and that they are still breathing.



**Step four:** Stay with the person until they have recovered.



## First aid for tonic clonic seizures: do's and don't's

### Do:

- note the time the seizure starts
- clear a space, support the person's head (use a cushion, a folded coat or support the head with your hands)
- loosen any tight neckwear, belts, etc.
- remove any spectacles and keep them safe
- turn the person into the recovery position when their convulsions stop
- clear excess saliva and check their airways and breathing
- reassure the person and minimise embarrassment if incontinence has occurred

### Don't:

- move the person unless they are in danger, e.g. in water, close to fire or heights
- force any object between their teeth, or try to remove dentures (unless dislodged)
- restrain them – allow the seizure to take its course
- give them drinks, medication, or apply a wet sponge

### CALL 999 FOR MEDICAL HELP IF:

- the seizure lasts for more than five minutes, or two minutes longer than is normal for that person
- the person does not regain consciousness
- further seizure(s) follow
- the person has an injury

## This is one in a series of information leaflets about epilepsy.

To access the others, or to find out more about our research, please visit our website: [www.epilepsyresearch.org.uk](http://www.epilepsyresearch.org.uk)

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