



Contact Pharmacy

Talk to your local pharmacist if you have any questions.

Epilepsy Awareness

Remember: 
March is Epilepsy Awareness Month.

How to Help



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If you see someone on the ground having a tonic-clonic (grand mal) seizure, here's how you can help:

- Do not put anything in their mouth, including your hands, says Dr. Eduard Bercovici.
- Roll them onto their left side. Make sure their head is slightly down so drool does not clog the airways, says Dr. Jacqueline A. French, an epileptologist.
- Ensure they are in a safe area, away from sharp objects. If the seizure lasts more than five minutes or is their first seizure, call 911.
- For additional resources, visit Canadianepilepsyalliance.org. —MC

by MEGAN CAMPBELL

Hope ahead

People living with epilepsy often suffer silently

Though the World Health Organization says that 50 million people worldwide have been diagnosed with epilepsy, much of society is unaware of the prevalence of this neurological disorder.

In fact, more people have been diagnosed with epilepsy than Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis and cerebral palsy combined, says Laura Dickson, president of the Canadian Epilepsy Alliance (canadianepilepsyalliance.org).



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"The reason that epilepsy appears to be rare is that two-thirds of those who are living with an epilepsy diagnosis have good control over their seizures with existing therapies," Dickson says. "You may never know someone has epilepsy."

March 26 is Purple Day, a global day for epilepsy awareness, and a good time to educate yourself about the causes, symptoms and treatments of this often misunderstood brain disorder.

What is epilepsy?

Epilepsy is the fourth most common neurological disorder worldwide. It affects the nervous system, causing recurring seizures, or electrical storms in the brain, under the right conditions, says Dr. Eduard Bercovici, neurologist and epileptologist in the Southern Ontario Epilepsy Clinic.

Different stimuli, such as flashing lights, loud or sudden noises, stress, lack of sleep or a combination of things, can trigger seizures. They can also occur randomly, and may present as an oddly timed laugh, staring, altered awareness, unusual behaviours or a sudden collapse to the ground.

A medical professional will make a diagnosis of epilepsy based on a patient's medical history and neurological exam.

The causes of epilepsy vary widely, ranging from a genetic predisposition to a brain injury or brain tumour, but for most, the reason is unknown. Anyone can develop it, though children and people ages 65 and older are more likely to experience seizures, according to the Epilepsy Foundation. Seizures in seniors are often caused by stroke, heart disease or other health problems.

Treating epilepsy

The first line of treatment for epilepsy is symptom management using one or more of the anti-seizure medications a neurologist or epileptologist can choose from. If those medications don't work, a number of other treatments may help, such as following a keto diet under the care of a registered dietitian, surgery or implantable brain stimulators, Bercovici says. Taking medications daily and as prescribed is important to prevent seizures from occurring.

Missing just one dose, even if someone has been taking their medications for years, could be enough for a seizure to occur, says Dr. Jacqueline A. French, epileptologist at the New York University (NYU) Langone Health Comprehensive Epilepsy Center and a neurology professor at NYU Grossman School of Medicine.

Living with epilepsy

With treatment, people can live long, productive lives, says Bercovici, who adds that many people hold down jobs and enjoy everyday activities like swimming or driving, though certain precautions must be taken. If you have epilepsy, you should talk to your doctor before swimming. Driving requirements for medical conditions vary by province.

"The challenge is it's still hidden," Bercovici says. Because of the stigma, people may not be comfortable telling others, which can lead to isolation, anxiety and depression.

This is why researchers have been working toward a cure that treats the underlying condition, not just the seizure symptoms. Many clinical trials happening now are testing various potential cures and therapies that target the causes of epilepsy, French says.

"We are at an inflection point," adds French, who believes a cure is close.

Finding a cure would be life-changing for people living with epilepsy and their families, French says.

Smart Tech

Some wearable technologies can help bring peace of mind for those living with epilepsy and their families. These tools can help alert emergency contacts when a seizure happens and bring more independence for those living with the condition. The devices look for changes in heart rate or falls and then send a notification and GPS location. For more information, visit Esebc.ca, click "Programs & Services" and "Seizure Alert Devices."—MC