



**apd**

**WESTERN CAPE  
ASSOCIATION FOR  
PERSONS WITH  
DISABILITIES**  
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adding  
value  
to  
lives

# Focus on... Epilepsy

## What is epilepsy?

- Epilepsy is the most common neurological condition.
- A single seizure does not necessarily mean you have epilepsy.
- 75% of people with epilepsy have had their first seizure before the age of 20.
- Up to 80% of people will have their epilepsy controlled by medication.
- Many children with epilepsy will outgrow it.
- Epilepsy is not a mental illness or psychiatric disorder.

- Epilepsy is not infectious or contagious.

- 1 in 20 people have a seizure at some time in their lives.

## What causes epilepsy?

- A seizure is caused by abnormal chemical activity of the brain.
- There are different forms of epilepsy and types of seizures
- Some people's seizures follow a definite pattern while others have unpredictable seizures.
- Some people get a warning before a seizure.
- Most seizures are over quickly and are easily dealt with.

## Who gets epilepsy?

- About 1 in every 100 people has epilepsy.
- Epilepsy can affect anyone, at any age.
- Epilepsy affects people of all levels of intelligence and from all racial and social backgrounds
- Anyone can develop epilepsy at any stage of life.
- Slightly more males than females have epilepsy.
- Epilepsy has not stood in the way of achievement for people like Jonty Rhodes, Vusi Mahlasela and Agatha Christie.

## How can I help?

For most people with epilepsy, the biggest problem they have to face is other people's attitudes to epilepsy.

Medical help is usually not necessary, but should be sought if :

- repetitive seizures occur without the regaining of consciousness in between,
- the seizure shows no sign of stopping after a few minutes, or
- there is a physical injury during the seizure.

What people with epilepsy most need is understanding and acceptance from the public.

| SEIZURE  | WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE  | HOW YOU CAN HELP  |
|--|---|---|
| Generalised absence (previously named petit mal)         | The person looks blank & stares. There may be blinking or slight twitching. It lasts a few seconds then normal activity continues.  | Be reassuring. The person may be unaware of the seizure. Note that it has occurred.   |
| Generalised tonic-clonic (previously named grand mal)    | The common sequence is: staring; stiffening of the body; possible blue colour around the mouth; jerking movements. As breathing restarts normal colour returns. There may be blood flecked saliva and incontinence (rare). Lasts a few minutes. | Protect the person from injury. Cushion the head. Do not restrict movement or put anything in the mouth. Help breathing by putting the person on to the side. Stay with him or her until fully recovered. |
| Complex partial (affecting a specific area of the brain) | May start with a warning or "aura". The person may appear confused or distracted. There may be repetitive movements, e.g. plucking at clothes.  | Remove harmful objects and guide the person away from danger. Talk quietly to reassure him or her.  |