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Epilepsy and Seizure Awareness

A Practical Guide for Care Staff

Knowledge Hub Resource 059

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Introduction

Epilepsy is a neurological condition that affects the brain and can cause recurrent seizures. A seizure happens when there is a sudden burst of abnormal electrical activity in the brain. Seizures can affect people in very different ways and do not always involve falling to the ground or experiencing convulsive movements.

Some individuals may experience brief periods of altered awareness, staring, confusion or unusual movements, while others may experience loss of consciousness, stiffening and rhythmic jerking movements. For people with diagnosed epilepsy, their usual seizure pattern and required support should be clearly documented in their individual care plan.

Care staff play an important role in recognising seizures, protecting individuals from injury, remaining calm, observing and timing seizure activity, following individual care plans and knowing when emergency medical assistance is required.

Why This Resource Matters

Understanding epilepsy and seizure awareness helps care staff to:

- Understand that seizures can present in different ways.
- Recognise an individual's usual seizure pattern where this is known.
- Know how to help keep someone safe during a seizure.
- Understand why a person experiencing a seizure should not be unnecessarily restrained.
- Know never to put anything into a person's mouth during a seizure.
- Understand the importance of timing and observing seizure activity.
- Provide appropriate support and reassurance following a seizure.
- Follow individual seizure care plans and emergency protocols.
- Recognise when urgent or emergency medical assistance is required.
- Record and report seizure activity accurately.

Key Message

Stay calm, protect the person from injury and follow their individual seizure care plan.

Never place anything in someone's mouth during a seizure and do not restrain their movements. Observe what happens, time the seizure where possible and follow agreed emergency procedures.

Understanding the individual's usual seizure pattern and care plan enables care staff to provide safe, appropriate and person-centred support.

Understanding Seizures

Seizures can affect people in different ways depending on which areas of the brain are involved. While some seizures involve loss of consciousness, stiffening and jerking movements, others may be much less obvious.

An individual may stare blankly, become temporarily unresponsive, make repetitive movements or appear confused. Care staff should therefore understand the individual's **usual seizure pattern**, where known, and follow their seizure care plan.

Not every seizure requires emergency medical treatment, particularly where an individual has diagnosed epilepsy and the seizure follows their usual pattern. However, staff must know when emergency assistance is required.

What to Do During a Seizure

If someone experiences a seizure:

- Stay calm and remain with the person.
- Note the time the seizure starts and, where possible, how long it lasts.
- Protect the person from injury by removing nearby hazards.
- Cushion their head if they are on the floor and it is safe to do so.
- Loosen restrictive clothing around the neck where appropriate.
- Do not restrain or attempt to stop their movements.
- **Never put anything into their mouth.**
- Do not give food or drink until they are fully alert and it is safe to do so.
- Follow the individual's seizure care plan and organisational procedures.
- Observe what happens so that accurate information can be recorded afterwards.

Once convulsive movements have stopped, check the person's breathing and follow their care plan. If they are breathing normally but remain unresponsive, place them in the **recovery position where appropriate and safe to do so**, and continue to monitor them.

After a Seizure

Following a seizure, an individual may experience a period of recovery known as the **postictal phase**. They may be:

- Confused or disorientated.
- Very tired or sleepy.
- Experiencing a headache or muscle soreness.
- Frightened, embarrassed or distressed.
- Temporarily experiencing difficulties with communication or memory.

Provide reassurance, privacy and time to recover. Stay with the individual as required by their care plan and monitor for any further changes or seizure activity.

Remember

Never restrain someone having a seizure and never put anything in their mouth.

Protect them from injury, observe and time the seizure, and follow their individual care plan.

If the seizure is prolonged, repeated without recovery, significantly different from the person's usual pattern, or you have concerns about their breathing or safety, follow emergency procedures and seek appropriate medical assistance.

Professional Responsibilities

Care staff have an important responsibility to provide safe and appropriate support before, during and after a seizure. Because epilepsy affects individuals differently, staff should understand the person's usual seizure pattern, individual care plan and any agreed emergency procedures.

As a care professional, you should always:

- Treat the individual with dignity, respect and reassurance.
- Know where to find and follow the individual's seizure care plan.
- Remain calm and protect the person from avoidable injury during a seizure.
- Observe and time seizure activity where possible.
- Never restrain the person's movements during a seizure.
- Never put anything into the person's mouth.
- Follow agreed procedures for supporting the individual following a seizure.
- Administer prescribed emergency or rescue medication only if appropriately trained, competent and authorised to do so.
- Record relevant observations accurately following the seizure.
- Report changes in seizure frequency, duration or presentation promptly.
- Work within the limits of your role, training and competence.

When to Call 999

Emergency medical assistance may be required if:

- It is the person's **first known seizure**.
- A convulsive seizure lasts **5 minutes or longer**, unless the person's individual emergency care plan specifies otherwise.
- One seizure follows another without the person regaining consciousness between them.
- The person has difficulty breathing after the seizure.
- The individual is seriously injured during the seizure.
- The seizure occurs while the person is in water.
- The seizure is significantly different from their usual seizure pattern and their care plan indicates emergency assistance is required.
- The person's condition gives you serious cause for concern.

Always follow the individual's emergency care plan and organisational procedures where these are available.

Recording and Reporting Seizures

Accurate observations can provide important information for healthcare professionals and help identify changes in an individual's epilepsy.

Where appropriate, records should include:

- When the seizure started and how long it lasted.
- What the individual was doing immediately beforehand.
- What was observed during the seizure.
- Whether consciousness or awareness appeared to be affected.
- Any injuries or other concerns.
- How the individual appeared and behaved afterwards.
- Any emergency action or prescribed rescue medication provided.

Records should be factual, clear and completed in accordance with organisational procedures.

Good Practice Reminder

Every person's epilepsy is different. Knowing the individual's usual seizure pattern and following their **personalised seizure care plan** is essential.

Stay calm, protect the person from injury, **never restrain them or put anything in their mouth**, time and observe the seizure, and know when emergency assistance is required. This helps ensure safe, confident and person-centred support.

Summary

Epilepsy is a neurological condition that can cause recurrent seizures, and seizures can present in many different ways. Understanding an individual's usual seizure pattern and following their personalised care plan are essential for providing safe and appropriate support.

Care staff play an important role in protecting individuals from injury, remaining calm, observing and timing seizures and providing reassurance during recovery. Staff should also know when emergency medical assistance is required and ensure seizure activity is accurately recorded and reported.

Epilepsy & Seizure Awareness Checklist

✓ Know the individual's usual seizure pattern and seizure care plan.

✓ Stay calm and remain with the person during a seizure.

✓ Protect the individual from avoidable injury.

✓ Time the seizure and observe what happens.

✓ **Never restrain the person's movements.**

✓ **Never put anything into the person's mouth.**

✓ Do not give food or drink until the person is fully alert and it is safe to do so.

✓ Provide reassurance, privacy and appropriate support during recovery.

✓ Administer prescribed rescue medication only when trained, competent and authorised.

✓ Record seizure activity accurately and report significant changes.

✓ Know when to follow emergency procedures and **call 999**.

Further Information

For further guidance on epilepsy and seizures, visit:

NHS – Epilepsy
https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/epilepsy/

Epilepsy Action
https://www.epilepsy.org.uk

Epilepsy Society
https://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk

NICE – Epilepsies in Children, Young People and Adults
https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng217

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