In Care of Kids



Non-Epileptic Spells

What is an epileptic seizure?

A seizure is a short, strong surge of electrical activity in the brain that causes a sudden change in mental or physical functions

What is a non-epileptic spell?

A non-epileptic spell is a brief change in a person's actions that isn't caused by unusual or abnormal electrical activity in the brain. It can feel and look like an epileptic seizure.

What causes a non-epileptic spells?

Non-epileptic spells are caused by stress or emotional upset.

How are non-epileptic spells diagnosed?

They are found by doing an EEG (electroencephalograph) during a non-epileptic spell. The EEG lets the doctor see if there are any changes in the electrical activity in the brain when the spells happen.

During a non-epileptic spell, the EEG pattern will be normal. During an epileptic seizure, the EEG will show abnormal electrical activity in the brain. This testing is most often done in a video EEG monitoring unit (EMU).

How are non-epileptic spells treated?

Non-epileptic spells are treated with mental therapy and/or psychiatric drugs. Seizure medicines won't stop non-epileptic spells.

Some people have both epileptic seizures and non-epileptic spells. These people will need to stay on their seizure medicine to control their epileptic seizures.

The health care team may include a primary care doctor, a neurologist or seizure disorder specialist, a psychologist or psychiatrist, a social worker, and nurse.

You should know:

Someone with non-epileptic spells isn't "faking it". They have a health problem that's out of their control. Some people with non-epileptic spells have depression, anxiety, or personality disorders. Some have no visible mental problems which is why people with these spells need to be checked and treated personby-person.

Author: Neurology | Approved by Patient Education Committee | Valid through 2025
The information presented is intended for educational purposes only. It is not intended to take the place of your personal doctor's advice and is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. The information should not be used in place of a visit, call or consultation or advice of your doctor or other health care provider.