A NEWSLETTER FOR MEMBERS OF THE MED-SENSE GUARANTEED ASSOCIATION

Summer 2026

Med-Sense Guaranteed Association

JOURNAL

Inside This Issue

MSGA
Med-Sense Guaranteed Association

Understanding Epilepsy

- Learn about your condition.
- Take your seizure medicines as prescribed.
- Check with your doctor before taking other medicines or supplements.
- Track your seizures to understand patterns.
- Learn what triggers your seizures and try to avoid them.
- Notify your doctor if your seizures continue or if you have side effects from your medication.
- Live a healthy lifestyle to keep other health conditions in check. Get enough sleep and physical activity. Eat a healthy diet. Maintain a healthy weight. Avoid tobacco products and limit alcohol.

Adapted from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Understanding Epilepsy
A Surge of Signals

Your brain contains a complex network of nerve cells, called neurons, that send signals to the rest of your body. These signals allow you to sense the world around you, control your body's movements, and experience emotions.

But sometimes things can go wrong. Groups of neurons may send abnormal bursts of signals all at once. This surge of brain activity is called a seizure.

Any seizure is a cause for concern. Epilepsy is a condition in which you have repeated seizures. But not all seizures mean you have epilepsy.

A seizure can cause strange sensations or feelings. You may experience uncontrollable movements or suddenly stare off into space.

These symptoms can be confusing. People who have them or see them may not realize they are signs of a seizure. The signs of a seizure depend on where signal surges happen.

Some people have a seizure only once or once in a while. But others have them regularly—even up to hundreds a day.

Scientists are still not sure what causes epilepsy in about one-half of people diagnosed with the disorder. NIH researchers are working to find better ways to diagnose and treat it.

Unraveling Symptoms

Anything that disturbs the pattern of normal brain activity can lead to seizures. Seizures may develop from illness,

infections, damage or tumors in the brain, genetic factors, or problems during brain development.

There are two main types of seizures: generalized and focal. Generalized seizures start in both sides of the brain. Focal seizures start on one side but may spread to both sides. Some people have both types of seizures, with no clear pattern.

"People often get the wrong idea about generalized seizures from TV," says Dr. Adam Hartman, an epilepsy specialist for children at NIH. "Usually someone is shown lying on the floor with all four limbs stiff or shaking. While that happens, other signs of generalized seizures are less obvious, like staring into space."

During focal seizures, some people may be unaware of what's happening. They may look confused or dazed, pick at their clothes, or smack their lips. They may be unable to answer questions or respond to directions for a few minutes.

People can lose consciousness in both types of seizures. When that happens, even briefly, they may fall or injure themselves. If seizures last longer than five minutes, seek medical care immediately. They can be life-threatening.

Children with delayed brain development and other developmental delays are more likely to have seizures. They're also more likely to die suddenly. This is referred to as sudden unexpected death in epilepsy, or SUDEP.

Children who develop a rare type of epilepsy called Dravet syndrome are one example. Dr. Lori Isom, an epilepsy expert at the University of Michigan, is looking into why they are less likely to survive. Studies have shown that people with this condition have genetic mutations, or changes to their DNA sequence.

"These genetic mutations affect not only the brain but also the heart," says Isom. "They can cause the heart to beat irregularly, as well as seizures."

Isom's team is trying to unravel how the brain and heart each contribute to SUDEP. In previous years, they helped develop a gene therapy to treat Dravet syndrome. Their gene therapy showed promise for improving seizures in an animal model they developed with NIH funding. Now, a private company is testing the treatment in children in a clinical trial.

Diagnosing Epilepsy

Epilepsy can develop at any age. But infants, children, and older adults are at the highest risk.

Diagnosing epilepsy involves a review of your medical history. You may have neurological testing and blood tests done. Blood tests can check for infections or genetic conditions. Several measures of brain activity can also help with diagnosis. These include electroencephalograms, or EEGs, and brain imaging scans.

Epilepsy can sometimes be hard to diagnose. Adults with the most common focal epilepsy, which occurs in the temporal lobes, often go undiagnosed or misdiagnosed. The temporal lobes are located on either side of the brain. Brain tissue in the area can deteriorate from seizures over time and with repeated seizures.

Faint patterns of brain damage can appear on MRI scans.

But these aren't always visible to a radiologist. Dr. Carrie McDonald, a scientist who specializes in imaging at the University of California, San Diego, is testing artificial intelligence (AI) to identify these brain patterns on MRI scans. Her group found that AI could correctly identify over 80% of individuals with temporal lobe epilepsy.

"Using AI to identify brain areas with specific patterns of damage will not only help radiologists but also surgeons," McDonald explains. "Surgeons can use the information to help guide them with implanting electrodes in an individual's brain. The electrodes monitor seizure activity and can help pinpoint the location of seizures."

Combining this technique with other brain activity testing can help doctors locate where a person's seizures are coming from. Understanding where seizures happen can help doctors choose the right treatment.

Getting Treatment

Doctors usually prescribe antiseizure drugs first to control seizures. But some people don't respond to these drugs. They may need to see a nervous system specialist, called a neurologist, who focuses on epilepsy.

Dr. Sara Inati, an epilepsy specialist at NIH, is researching better ways to evaluate and treat people with drug-resistant epilepsy. They may have repeated seizures that can damage specific areas of the brain over time.

Inati's recent study looked at brain scans of people with drug-resistant epilepsy. She analyzed scans with abnormal results. She found that the size of two brain areas, the hippocampus and the amygdala, often changed. These brain changes were not in the same place that seizures happened. And they differed depending on which side of the brain seizures were located.

"Brain changes can start in one part of the brain and cause damage in other parts that doctors may not know about," says Inati. "Having this information can help them adjust their treatment plan."

Other treatment options can include surgery or implanted devices. These devices send electrical impulses to the brain. Some people may also benefit from changes to their diet.

Learning to live with epilepsy can be challenging. But many people do well with treatment and live a full life.

Article reprinted from NIH-News In Health

Complete Coverage℠

With ASPCA Pet Health Insurance, you can choose the care you want when your pet is hurt or sick and have the comfort of knowing they have coverage.

Our coverage includes exam fees, diagnostics, treatments, and alternative therapies for:

- ✔ Accidents
- ✔ Illnesses
- ✔ Cancer
- ✔ Hereditary Conditions
- ✔ Behavioral Issues
- ✔ Dental Disease

Simple to Customize

Pick Your Annual Limit

You set your annual coverage limit, with choices from $5,000 to unlimited.*

Add Preventive Care

Get reimbursed a set amount for things that protect your pet from getting sick, like vaccines, dental cleanings, and screenings for a little more per month.

Select Accident-Only Coverage

If you're just looking to have some cushion when your pet gets hurt, you can change your coverage to only include care for accidents.

*Pre-existing conditions are not covered. Waiting periods, annual deductible, co-insurance, benefit limits, and exclusions may apply. For all terms and conditions visit www.aspcapetinsurance.com/terms. Customers enrolled on product Levels 1-4 should visit the Member Center for their policy benefits. Products may vary and are subject to change.

Your coverage.

Customize your coverage for a fit that's right for both of you.

Log in at medsensemembers.com for complete details

Coping With Chemo:

The Side Effects of Cancer Treatment

Cancer cells multiply in an uncontrolled way, making them difficult for your body to stop. Chemotherapy, or chemo for short, uses drugs to kill cancer cells or stop them from growing. These drugs usually target cells that are growing quickly. Normal body cells can also get caught in the crossfire of many chemotherapy drugs, causing unwanted side effects. Scientists are finding ways to lessen chemo's impact on your body.

Most of the cells in your body divide and multiply into new cells. Your body needs new cells to replace old or damaged ones. Some of the body's healthy cells multiply frequently, like those that line the intestines and those involved in hair growth. Chemotherapy drugs can kill these cells, too.

Chemo can have a range of unwanted side effects. Common ones include nausea and vomiting, mouth sores, fatigue, and hair loss. Which side effects a person with cancer has depends on many things. These include the type of cancer being treated and which chemotherapy drug is used.

Chemo can reduce your white blood cell count. These cells help your body fight off infections and disease. Fewer white blood cells can lead to a higher risk of infections. Some chemotherapy drugs can cause nerve damage called chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy (CIPN). This leads to pain, tingling, numbness, and loss of balance.

"Chemotherapy does work," explains Dr. Ting Bao, a cancer specialist at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. "There are side effects, but they are becoming more and more manageable."

Antinausea drugs can help with nausea and vomiting. Changes to your diet can help to manage nausea, fatigue, and mouth sores. Physical activity and healthy sleep habits can help combat fatigue. Medications may also be available for some kinds of pain caused by chemo. For CIPN pain, however, there are very few options. Your doctor can recommend what may work for you based on your symptoms.

Researchers are looking for new ways to reduce the side effects of chemo. Studies suggest that acupuncture may help relieve nausea and vomiting. This ancient practice uses thin needles to stimulate specific points on the body. Scientists are also testing herbal remedies, like ginger, to see if they help with nausea.

Bao is testing acupuncture and yoga for treating CIPN. Yoga combines physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation.

"These ancient modalities intrigue me because they don't have much side effects," Bao says. "For acupuncture, the most common side effects are a little bruising and bleeding. And for yoga, joint and muscle pain."

Her recent studies suggest that these techniques could help ease some of the symptoms of CIPN. She now has larger trials ongoing.

Other research teams are trying to understand the molecular underpinnings of CIPN and testing drugs that target them.

If you're preparing for chemo, ask about possible side effects. Your doctor can help you make a management plan. Most cancer centers offer treatment education sessions. These sessions provide information about expected side effects. Patient support groups are also available to help you navigate cancer treatment.

Article reprinted from NIH-News In Health

If you're undergoing chemotherapy treatment, find out more about managing side effects. Ask your health care team:

- What side effects am I at higher risk for based on my cancer type or treatment?
- When might side effects start? How long might they last?
- What signs or symptoms should I call you about?
- What steps can I take to feel better?
- What precautions should I take to stay safe?
- What medicines can help?
- What foods and drinks do you advise? Which should I avoid?
- Could you refer me to a specialist who could give me further advice?

For information regarding your membership
and association services, call or write:

Membership Services Office
Med-Sense Guaranteed Association
12444 Powerscourt Drive
Suite 500A
St. Louis, MO 63131
1-800-992-8044 or (636) 530-7200

MSGA
Med-Sense Guaranteed Association