

Common Seizures Types

There are many types of seizures. The different types begin in different areas of the brain and they are grouped into two categories: *partial* and *generalized*.

Partial Seizures

A partial seizure occurs when the excessive electrical discharge is limited to one part of the brain. Sometimes seizures begin as partial and then spread and become generalized. These are referred to as *partial seizures secondarily generalized*.

The two most common kinds of partial seizures are *simple partial* and *complex partial*. During a simple partial seizure, awareness remains intact. In a complex partial seizure, awareness is impaired.

A *simple partial* seizure usually begins suddenly and lasts seconds to minutes.

It may involve symptoms that result in a person experiencing an unusual sensation, feeling, or movement called an *aura*. An aura can take many different forms. For example, an aura might be a distortion in sight, sound, or smell, sudden jerky movements of one area of the body, dizziness, or a sudden overwhelming emotion. An aura is a simple partial seizure that may occur alone or may progress to a complex partial seizure or a generalized seizure.

During a *complex partial* seizure, a person experiences altered awareness and may appear dazed and confused. A dreamlike experience may occur.

The seizure often begins with an unusual sensation, feeling, or movement referred to as an *aura*. The aura often occurs just before awareness is altered and can be used as a warning.

Random purposeless movements over which the individual has no control called *automatisms* often characterize the seizure. These may include movements such as chewing motions, lip smacking, pulling at clothing, or random walking. Occasionally there are more dramatic behavioral changes such as screaming, undressing, or laughing at inappropriate times.

The seizure usually lasts between one and two minutes and is often followed by a postictal period of disorientation or confusion.

Generalized Seizures

A generalized seizure is characterized by the involvement of the whole brain. The excessive electrical discharge is widespread and involves both sides of the brain. The seizure may or may not be convulsive. A generalized seizure commonly takes one of two forms: **absence** (without convulsions) or **tonic clonic** (with convulsions).

Absence seizures result in a blank stare usually lasting less than 10 seconds. The seizure starts and ends abruptly, and awareness is impaired during the seizure. These seizures are sometimes misinterpreted as daydreaming or inattentiveness. Following the seizure, alertness is regained quickly.

A **tonic clonic** seizure usually lasts from one to three minutes. The **tonic phase** of this seizure type typically involves a crying out or groan, a loss of awareness, and a fall as consciousness is lost and muscles stiffen. The cry or groan at the start of a convulsive seizure is not from pain. It is the sound of air being forced out of the lungs. The second phase or **clonic phase** of the seizure usually involves a convulsion and there is jerking and twitching of the muscles in all four limbs. Usually the movements involve the whole body. Urinary or bowel control may be lost and there may be shallow breathing, a bluish or gray skin color, and drooling.

Awareness is regained slowly and the person often experiences a postictal period of fatigue, confusion, or a severe headache after the seizure.

Other types of generalized seizures include **atonic** and **myoclonic** seizures. An **atonic** seizure involves a sudden loss of muscle tone often resulting in a person falling down or almost falling down, dropping objects, or nodding the head involuntarily. Typically, these seizures last for a few seconds. A **myoclonic** seizure results in a sudden jerk of part of the body such as the arm or leg. The person may fall over. The seizure is very brief.

