

Seizure First Aid

There are several kinds of seizures; they all look different, and they require different kinds of first aid. Below are some general guidelines on what to do if a child or an adult begins to have a seizure.

1 Help the person lie on the floor, on his or her side.

During a seizure, a person is unable to control his or her movements and posture. Lying on the floor minimizes the risk of physical injury. Often, an individual will vomit during a seizure episode. Placing the person on his or her side prevents choking. Make sure to **move objects away** that are potentially dangerous to the individual (for example, sharp objects, glass, etc.).

2 Do not put anything in the person's mouth.

It is a common misconception that an individual may swallow his or her tongue during a seizure. Although it is possible that a person may bite his or her tongue, this rarely, if ever, causes serious injury. On the other hand, the human jaw is very powerful, and people have bitten off spoons, sticks, and other objects during a seizure. In addition, placing anything in the person's mouth poses a greater danger of choking.

3 If the seizure activity lasts more than five minutes, call for paramedics.

Most seizures are brief and self-limited, but they occasionally do last longer. If you have a rectal medication (i.e., Diastat®) available, administer it as directed. **Do not attempt to administer medications by mouth!** A person is unable to swallow during a seizure and will most likely choke if something is placed in his or her mouth (as mentioned above).

4 Check to see if the individual has a medical ID bracelet or necklace that says "epilepsy" or "seizure disorder."

Some individuals wear a medical ID bracelet or necklace to let other people know that they are being treated for seizures. One or more medications may be listed on the back of the ID tag, so that health care professionals will know immediately what the person uses to treat the seizure disorder.

5 Try to remain calm.

Remember that most seizures are brief and self-limited, and the patient is rarely in danger. However, **if at any time there is concern for someone's safety, call for help.** Speak softly and reassuringly to the person having the seizure, and offer help until the seizure ends. Stay with the person until he or she is completely awake and aware again.

6 There are some special things to remember if a seizure occurs while the individual is in water (in the bathtub or while swimming).

Support the person having the seizure, making sure the head is tilted so that the face and head stay above the surface of the water. Help the person to get out of the water as soon as possible. Once on dry land, make sure he or she is breathing. If the individual is not breathing, begin rescue breathing at once and call 911. **Anyone who has had a seizure while in the water should go to the emergency room for a checkup, even if he or she seems to be all right afterward. If a lot of water was swallowed or aspirated, there could be damage to the heart and lungs.**

When should you call 911?

You should call 911 if:

- you have no way of knowing whether the person has epilepsy.
- the person having a seizure does not have epilepsy, as it could be a sign of serious illness.
- the person having a seizure is pregnant, has diabetes, is injured in some way, or appears to be ill.
- the seizure lasts longer than five (5) minutes.
- another seizure starts right after the first one ends.
- the person has trouble breathing, seems hurt, or is in pain.
- the person isn't recovering the way he or she usually does following a seizure.

You do not need to call 911 if:

- the seizure ends after a couple of minutes.
- the individual wakes up and starts breathing normally again.
- the person is fully awake and aware after a short rest.

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** Seizure First Aid is intended to provide basic information about appropriate ways to respond when an individual begins having a seizure. It is not intended to replace medical or other advice. Readers are warned not to take any action with regard to unauthorized medical treatment without first consulting a physician.*