

Tips for Seizure Observation

When watching a seizure, try to note what happens in each part of the seizure—before, during, and after the event. Write down what happens as soon as you can—it’s easy to forget details when you don’t write them down.

Here’s a list of things that may happen during a seizure. Remember what you see will depend on the type of seizure that occurs. Try to record as much as you or someone else sees and what the student reports. This will give you a good baseline to see if things change over time.

What happened before the seizure?

- What was the person doing when the seizure began?
- Was there a change in mood or behavior hours or days before?
- Was there a warning or aura right before the seizure?

What happens during the event?

- Awareness of what is going on - are they awake, aware or confused
- Ability to talk and understand - clear speech, responds with only a few words or noises, speech doesn’t make sense, unable to talk
- Ability to think clearly, pay attention, remember
- Changes in mood or emotions
- Changes in seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, feeling, or different or unusual sensations (may sense something that is not really there)
- Facial expression - staring, twitching, eye blinking or rolling, drooling
- Muscle tone - body becomes stiff or limp
- Movements of part or all of the body - jerking or twitching movements, unable to move, body or head turning to one side, falls
- Automatic or repeated movements - lipsmacking, chewing, swallowing, picking at clothes, rubbing hands, tapping feet, dressing or undressing
- Walking, wandering, running
- Color of skin, sweating, breathing
- Loss of bladder or bowel control

What happens after the event (recovery period)?

- Able to respond to voice or touch
- Aware of own name, observer’s name, place, time
- Able to remember what happened
- Able to talk or communicate
- Weak or numb in any part of the body
- Having a change in mood or behavior
- Tired or need to sleep, headache or other pain
- Other symptoms— for example headache, upset stomach, pain

Other Key Observation Points

When did the event occur?

- Date, Time

What part of the body was involved?

- Where did the symptoms start?
- Did they spread to other areas?
- What side of the body was involved (right, left, or both)?

Were there possible triggers?

- Any patterns or factors that made a seizure more likely

How long did it last?

- Length of aura or warning
- Length of seizure from beginning to end (not counting the recovery period)
- Length of recovery period (how long before the person returns to normal activity)

Disclaimer: This publication is designed to provide general information about epilepsy and seizures to the public. It is not intended as medical advice.

People with epilepsy should not make changes to treatment or activities based on this information without first consulting their health care provider.

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About the Foundation: The Epilepsy Foundation, and its network of 50 organizations throughout the United States, leads the fight to overcome the challenges of living with epilepsy and to accelerate therapies to stop seizures, find cures, and save lives. To learn more, please visit epilepsy.com.