

# Describing and Recording Seizures



Parents are often asked to describe what their child's seizures look like. What a seizure looks like is important for making a diagnosis and for guiding the treatment plan. Every child's seizures are different. Some children have more than one type of seizure.

Consider the following as you describe and record what happens when your child has a seizure. Let your child's Epilepsy Team know if there is a change in what your child's seizures look like.



### Level of awareness (consciousness)

- aware (able to look at you or talk to you, knows who you are)
- not aware (doesn't respond to you)

### Movement of limbs

- arms:  right  left  both
- legs:  right  left  both

### Type of movement

- sudden loss of muscle tone (atonic)
- stiffening (tonic)
- jerking (clonic)
- jerk of single muscle or limb (myoclonic)
- posturing – uncontrolled, abnormal positioning of the body (e.g., flexing back)
- dystonia – involuntary muscle contractions that cause slow, repeated movements or abnormal postures
- other movements (e.g., bicycling, flailing, spasms, kicking)



### Eye movements

- blinking  fluttering  rolling  staring  twitching
- deviation (eyes fixed to one direction):
  - right  left  up  down
- pupils dilated (big)  pupils constricted (small)



### Facial movements

- twitching  swallowing  chewing  spitting  jerking
- lip smacking  jaw clenching  yawning  drooling

### Head movements

- right  left  up  down  no movement



### Hand movements

- buttoning  unbuttoning  hand clenching  clapping  fumbling
- grabbing  hand rubbing  picking  tapping  twitching



### Vocalizations

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- cursing    barking    gagging    gasping    gibberish    groaning  
 grunting    howling    humming    laughing    moaning    screaming  
 singing    snorting    talking    whistling



### Skin changes

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- flushed    pale    blue    cold to touch



### General behaviours

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- agitation/distress    emotional responses  
(anger outbursts, appears frightened, crying, laughing)  
 changes in breathing pattern  
 unconscious movements  
(running, twirling, wandering, turning over, undressing)  
 vomiting  
 loss of bladder and/or bowel control



### Symptoms reported by the person who had the seizure

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- unusual sensations  
 sounds \_\_\_\_\_    tastes \_\_\_\_\_    smells \_\_\_\_\_    visions \_\_\_\_\_  
 uncomfortable sensations (burning, numbness, pins and needles)  
 "butterflies" in stomach    upset stomach  
 flushed feeling  
 dizziness  
 uncontrolled thoughts (anxiety, déjà vu, out of body experience, fear, forced thinking, loss of memory, sadness, sense of doom or dread)



### Symptoms after the seizure

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- fatigue/tired/sleepy    difficulty talking  
 headache (how long, where, how bad)    poor coordination  
 loss of bladder and/or bowel control    weakness, unable to move  
 injury (where, type)    decreased gag reflex/poor swallowing  
 behaviour changes    changes in sleep pattern  
 confusion



### Other information about the seizure

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- Time of the seizure
- How long the seizure lasted
- Activity before the seizure
- Symptoms felt by your child before the seizure started (aura)
- Changes in behaviour before the seizure (e.g., irritability, restlessness)
- Possible triggers (e.g., lack of sleep, fever, illness, dehydration, low blood sugar, hyperventilation, stress, change in medication, missed medication dose)
- Any special treatment needed (e.g., medication given)



## Recording signs and symptoms

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Keeping track of your child's signs and symptoms is important for diagnosis.

Information you can record includes:

- the time of day the seizure occurred
- what your child was doing before the seizure
- if she is sick, tired, or stressed
- if she is taking any medication
- how the seizure began
- if she felt any warning signs
- what her movements (if any) looked like during the seizure
- if the movements were on a particular side of her body
- whether she was able to talk and respond during the seizure
- whether she made any sounds
- how long the seizure lasted
- if she was confused, tired, or sore after the seizure
- if she could speak normally after the seizure

## List the types of seizures your child has

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- \_\_\_\_\_  
 What does it look like?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_  
 What does it look like?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_  
 What does it look like?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Developed by the SickKids Comprehensive Epilepsy Program