

Be Enlightened: Know

more about epilepsy

There are many misconceptions concerning epilepsy. In Hong Kong, as with most places around the world, epilepsy is generally misunderstood and stigmatised, and discrimination is prevalent. In Britain, it was not until the 1970s that a law forbidding people to marry with epilepsy was repealed.

This article, from **Enlighten — Action for Epilepsy** will not tell you the myths and misconceptions about epilepsy, but the facts. It will tell you about people with epilepsy. It will show you how to recognise different types of seizures and also what to do when you encounter someone who is having a seizure.

Annie is a ballerina. Her favourite colour is pink. She loves running in her bare feet in the sand on Big Wave Bay and building sandcastles. She loves to swim. She loves to race her two brothers and fly kites. Annie loves dogs and cats, but Annie has an allergy to cats so can't have one as a pet. She has Tiger, the goldfish instead. As a compromise her Dad sometimes takes her to the pet shop at the weekend. Annie wants to dance for The Royal Ballet and be a champion surfer for Hong Kong when she grows up. Annie is 9 years old. She is just like any other kid.

Last weekend I met Annie and her Mum in Central to do some shopping. Chocolate fudge cake was to follow a strategically engineered shopping spree. We never made it.

Annie had a seizure.

Would you have known what to do?

Epilepsy is the second most common neurological problem after migraine. It affects about 50 million people in the world. More than 37,000 of those with epilepsy live in Hong Kong. Some of the most common causes of epilepsy are head injuries. Others result from febrile seizures, cerebral tumours, drugs and alcohol, or are simply genetic.

Epilepsy is a disorder characterised by random, but recurring seizures (previously known as 'fits'). It involves a disturbance in the brain's normal electricity and can take on many forms.

Types of Seizures

There are two main categories of seizures: *Partial seizures* which begin in one part of the brain and can spread to affect the other parts, and *generalised seizures* which start in both sides of the brain at once.

There are two types of partial seizures: *simple partial* and *complex partial*.

A quick quiz for you!

Yes or No? Tick the box.

1. Is Epilepsy a mental illness?
Yes No
2. Is epilepsy contagious?
Yes No
3. Do you dial 999 as soon as someone has an epileptic seizure?
Yes No
4. Do you hold someone down when they are having a seizure?
Yes No
5. Should you put something in someone's mouth when they have a seizure?
Yes No

Answers: If you have to think about any of these answers for more than a second, you need to contact: Enlighten 2820-0111 or at info@enlightenhk.org or visit us at 12B, Shun Pont Commercial Building, 5-11 Thomson Road, Wanchai

Simple Partial Seizures:

Their consciousness is not impaired. The seizures are confined to either rhythmic twitching or jerking of one limb or there is an unusual sensation of one body part such as pins and needles. There can be distortions in smell, hearing or vision, stomach discomfort or a sudden sense of fear. The person is likely to experience the same type of simple partial seizure. If another seizure type follows, the above sensations may be referred as a warning or an 'aura'.

Complex Partial Seizures:

We refer to it being 'partial' because only part of the brain is affected and 'complex' because the disturbance affects awareness. People may experience strange and unusual feelings, taste or smell, or other unusual sensations. They experience an altered sense of time and are aware of surroundings (ie. as in a dream-like state). They also experience a change in behaviour such as chewing, lip smacking, buttoning, and fiddling of clothes or nearby objects, moving aimlessly and emotional changes such as crying or laughing

What is a Generalised Seizure?

A large part of the brain is involved at the onset of a generalised seizure. Consciousness is impaired or lost and the most dramatic form

of this type of seizure is the 'tonic-clonic' or 'grand mal' (*generalised convulsive*).

How to identify someone who is having a tonic-clonic/grand mal seizure:

The person may cry and become rigid and usually falls to the floor with all four limbs jerking.

Breathing may stop temporarily or the person may go blue. Urinary and faecal incontinence may also occur. The convulsion usually lasts for a few minutes and on recovery, the person may become sleepy, confused or complain of a severe headache. The features mentioned are what most people think of as *epilepsy*. The person may appear distressed but often this type of seizure is more worrying to those witnessing it than for the person having the seizure.

Other varieties of generalised seizures are as follows:

Tonic: The person experiences a general stiffening of the muscles but no rhythmic jerking. The person may fall to the floor, often

Did you know?

Abraham Lincoln
Agatha Christie
Alexander the Great
Alfred Nobel
Aristotle
Baron Byron
Charles Dickens
Danny Glover
Edgar Allan Poe
Elton John
Florence Griffith Joyner
Fyodor Dostoyevsky
Jack Lemmon
Julius Caesar
Leonardo da Vinci
Lewis Carroll
Lord Byron
Louis XIII of France
Margaux Hemingway
Martin Luther
Michelangelo
Napoleon Bonaparte
Neil Young
Peter the Great
Sir Isaac Newton
Sir Walter Scott
Socrates
Tom Smith
Tchaikovsky
Pythagoras
Richard Burton and Annie,
all have epilepsy