

# Epilepsy

## **Introduction**

Africa is a continent where myths dominate almost every facet of our life. Some people are ostracized in the community for the simple reason that they suffer from one form of condition or the other.

Today we will be discussing seizure disorders popularly known as epilepsy. What is epilepsy and what are the myths around this condition? These and many more questions will be answered today.

Epilepsy is a chronic brain disorder that briefly interrupts the normal activities of the brain to cause seizures. And so what is seizure? Seizure can be described as a condition that is characterized by sudden uncontrolled movement of the body, disorientation and loss of consciousness.

## **What happens in seizure?**

Seizure or epilepsy occurs as a result of excessive generation of electrical impulses in the brain and a reduction in the inhibitory system.

Naturally our brain produces electrical impulses which are what is responsible for the activities of the brain. To keep this in check the body has a counter system called the inhibitory system. It is the inhibitory system that ensures that there is no excessive production of the electrical impulses. Thus in seizure, the brain generates excess electrical impulses and the inhibitory system at that point could not control the impulse.

## **Types of seizure**

Simple partial seizure.

This affects only a part of the body. It may involve one hand or one leg, or eyes only.

Complex partial seizure

The patient in this case moves like he is in a trance with an uncontrollable body movement even though he may be aware of the environment. If this happens in a spiritual church, he may be mistaken for being in the spirit.

### Absence seizure

This type is rare in adults; it is a sudden loss of consciousness for some seconds or few minutes without the person being aware. It could happen as an upward starring of the eyes.

### Generalized seizure/ Tonic clonic seizure/ Grand mal

In this case the whole brain is involved which makes the whole body to go into a rhythmic contraction and relaxation. There is usually a period of aura in which the patient has a premonition about the attack. This could be in form of sudden fear, sudden rush of saliva into the mouth, sudden change in the taste of the saliva and so on. Then the patient gives out a loud cry caused by sudden contraction of the respiratory muscles. The body then goes into a state of cycles of contractions and relaxations. Some patients foam in the mouth, some pass urine and or excreta during the seizure. And as soon as the seizure is over, they sometimes sleep off only to wake up confused.

### **Causes of epilepsy.**

The fact that in most cases, the cause may be unknown is nothing but true. However some causes have been identified and these include, head injury from an accident in the past where the person possibly had an impact on the head. Meningitis, encephalitis, stroke and brain tumor can be a cause. Others like lead poisoning, and drugs like propofol can also be culprit.

Epilepsy is usually triggered by flashing light or a flickering T.V screen, or a sudden loud noise.

### **Treatments**

The mainstay of the treatments is to identify the cause and treat it if it is treatable, to prevent further attack by placing patients on drugs for the specific

type of the seizure. Some of the common anti epileptic drugs are carbamazepine, sodium valproate, phenytoin to mention but a few. The patient should visit his doctor who will identify the type of seizure disorder he suffers from and gives the right medication. In cases where the doctor is confused, the patient will be referred to specialists who are ever ready to take up the challenge. In extreme cases when there is treatment failure, the patient may require a neurosurgery where the affected part of the brain will be carefully removed such that the patient will still be able to live a normal life.

### **The dos and don'ts during an attack**

Sometimes during an epileptic attack as well as convulsion, close relatives tend to do things in the name of helping the patient. You should know that some of these interventions cause more harm than good. I often tell relatives that epilepsy as well as convulsion most times does not kill and many of the time will resolve on its own even without any intervention. It is the intervention that kills most of the time. People should not attempt to put spoon, knife or wood in the mouth in the name of saving the tongue. Apart from the fact that this action can introduce infection into the patient, it can also wound the patient and worse still it can dislodge a tooth which if enters the lung can cause aspiration and death. Habits like given people urine to drink or burning the hand and leg in the fire should be avoided as tetanus can infect the wound even after the seizure has subsided.

### **What to do for an epileptic patient.**

Whenever there is someone convulsing around you, first clear the environment of any harmful thing the person can land on, like knife, chairs, stove etc then try to provide a soft landing for the patient by either putting the head on a pillow or cloths. If it is possible hold the patient to lie on his left side and calm down. If the convulsion persists for more than five minutes, rush the patient to the hospital. If it resolves before five minute, take the patient to the hospital where he will be properly examined and the cause will be identified.

### **Conclusion**

I will like to encourage people suffering from this disease to go ahead and live a normal life. They should try to be on drug to avoid attack, avoid involvement in

any dangerous work like driving except if they had been seizure free for six months.

They should not allow people to take their happiness away from them in the name of stigmatization. If Julius Caesar the great Roman Emperor despite having an epileptic attack at his coronation can bounce back and still remained a great man, then what stops you from becoming great? You once had an attack in the market, church, street and as a result you don't want to pass the place again? Why? How many people were there? Are they as many as those in Julius Caesar's coronation? Bull shit.

Until next week, when I shall be here again, always remember that in medicine, the earlier is always better.

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