

What is Epilepsy?



Epilepsy is a condition in which disrupted brain activity leads to seizures. A child is diagnosed with epilepsy after two or more unprovoked seizures, or seizures that aren't caused by something specific. A child who has only provoked seizures (for example, febrile seizures) won't typically have a diagnosis of epilepsy.

Intervention and appropriate treatment can help ease epilepsy symptoms and seizures. Explore epilepsy diagnosis and treatment options.



What Are Seizures?

In the brain, constant electrical activity takes place in and between cells. A seizure is an abnormal electrical discharge in brain cells that disrupts normal activity, behavior or movement.

Seizures can be mild, severe, or somewhere in between. How epilepsy affects a child can vary widely depending on the severity. Co-existing conditions (such as cerebral palsy) can play a role in how seizures affect a child as well.

Clues that a child is having a seizure include:

- Sudden changes in alertness or behavior.
- Uncontrolled staring or “zoning out.”
- Repetitive, involuntary jerking movements.
- Loss of consciousness.
- Changes in breathing patterns.



What Causes Epilepsy?

Because epilepsy can have many causes, a neurologist runs tests to help determine if and why your child has epilepsy.

Some of the known causes of epilepsy in children include:

- Brain injury caused by low levels of oxygen in the blood.
- Brain injury caused by premature birth.
- Chromosomal abnormalities.
- Brain malformations that develop during pregnancy.

- Genetic epilepsy syndromes.
- Other genetic factors.
- Blood infections.
- Central nervous system infections, such as bacterial meningitis, viral encephalitis or tuberculosis.
- Metabolic disorders.
- Strokes.
- **Traumatic brain injuries.**
- Tumors of the nervous system.

Explore Epilepsy Advocacy and Support Organizations

[The Epilepsy Foundation](#)

[The Epilepsy Foundation offers information and resources about epilepsy.](#)

[Learn More](#)

[International League Against Epilepsy](#)

[Learn More](#)

Appointment: 651-290-8707

Refer a Patient: 651-325-2200

Pediatric Expert Consult (<https://www.gillettechildrens.org/conditions-care/pediatric-expert-consult>)

More Ways to Contact Us (<https://www.gillettechildrens.org><https://www.gillettechildrens.org/contact-us>)

This information is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care providers. If you have any questions, talk with your doctor or others on your health care team.

If you are a Gillette patient with urgent questions or concerns, please contact Telehealth Nursing at **651-229-3890**.