



Focal and Generalized Seizures

Focal Seizures

Focal seizures, also called *partial seizures*, occur in just one part of the brain. These seizures are frequently described by the area of the brain in which they originate. For example, someone might be diagnosed with focal frontal lobe seizures, or a temporal lobe seizure.

In a *simple focal seizure*, the person will remain conscious but experience unusual feelings or sensations that can take many forms. The person may experience sudden and unexplainable feelings of joy, anger, sadness, or nausea. He or she also may hear, smell, taste, see, or feel things that are not real.

In a *complex focal seizure*, the person has a change in or loss of consciousness. His or her consciousness may be altered, producing a dreamlike experience. People having a complex focal seizure may display strange, repetitious behaviors such as blinks, twitches, mouth movements, or even walking in a circle. These repetitious movements are called automatisms. More complicated actions, which may seem purposeful, can also occur involuntarily.

Generalized Seizures

Generalized seizures are a result of abnormal neuronal activity on both sides of the brain. These seizures may cause loss of consciousness, falls, or massive muscle spasms. There are many kinds of generalized seizures.

In *absence seizures*, the person may appear to be staring into space and/or have jerking or twitching muscles. These seizures are sometimes referred to as petit mal seizures, which is an older term.

Tonic seizures cause stiffening of muscles of the body, generally those in the back, legs, and arms. *Clonic seizures* cause repeated jerking movements of muscles on both sides of the body.

Myoclonic seizures cause jerks or twitches of the upper body, arms, or legs.

Atonic seizures (aka drop seizure, or drop attack) cause a loss of normal muscle tone. The affected person will fall down or may drop his or her head involuntarily.

Tonic-clonic seizures cause a mixture of symptoms, including stiffening of the body and repeated jerks of the arms and/or legs as well as loss of consciousness. Tonic-clonic seizures are sometimes referred to by an older term: *grand mal seizures*.