EPILEPSY IN CHILDREN

Being diagnosed with epilepsy can be frightening and frustrating for both children and their parents. But by getting proper medical treatment, maintaining a positive outlook and making some lifestyle changes, you can empower your child to manage his or her condition and live a full and productive life.

WHAT IS EPILEPSY?
Epilepsy is a neurological condition where neurons in the brain sometimes signal abnormally and excessively, causing seizures. There are many types of seizures, each with their own set of symptoms. Some of these symptoms include involuntary body movements or twitching, strange sensations and emotions, abnormal behavior and loss of consciousness.

WHAT CAUSES EPILEPSY?
In nearly two-thirds of all cases of epilepsy, doctors are unable to identify a specific cause for the disease. But in other cases, epilepsy could be due to:

- Oxygen deprivation to the baby during labor and delivery
- Severe brain or head injury
- Brain tumors
- Brain infections, such as meningitis, cysticercosis, encephalitis or brain abscess
- Genetic disorders
- Stroke

HOW IS EPILEPSY DIAGNOSED?
In addition to taking a detailed medical history, there are a number of different tools that help doctors determine if a child has epilepsy and what type of seizures he or she has, including:

1. EEG (electroencephalogram)
2. MRI (magnetic resonance imaging)
3. CT Scan (computed tomography)
4. PET (positron emission tomography)
5. Blood tests
6. Neurological, developmental, and behavioral tests

**SEIZURE TRIGGERS**

In some children, seizures may be triggered by stress, skipping meals, lack of sleep, missing a dose of medication, and flashing or flickering lights. Keeping a diary of your kid’s seizures may help you identify if there are any patterns to when the seizures happen so you can try to avoid any relevant triggers.

**PARENTING CHILDREN WITH EPILEPSY**

Children with epilepsy often feel embarrassed, frustrated, and helpless about their condition. And unless the parents have positive, constructive, and empowering attitudes, the child may feel different from others, withdraw from peer groups, and develop poor self-esteem.

To help build confidence and independence in your child, focus on what they can do and enjoy doing, rather than what they can’t. Encourage your child to develop and maintain friendships; and always be open and honest with your child about his or her condition.

**BEHAVIORAL CHANGES**

Children with epilepsy may have behavioral and mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, attention deficit disorder (alone or with hyperactivity), and negative behaviors.

However, the role of seizures in causing these problems is not known because it can be difficult to distinguish the effects of seizures from other contributing factors, including poor child and family response to the condition, the side effects of antiepileptic medication, and neurological dysfunction that causes both the seizures and the behavioral problems. If your child is experiencing behavioral issues, it’s a good idea to talk to your doctor about counseling and other treatments.

**SPORTS AND LEISURE ACTIVITIES**
Most children with epilepsy can take part in the same activities as other kids. However, it’s a good idea to talk to a doctor before your child tries a new sport or activity, particularly if his or her seizures are not well controlled. Simple measures can help make activities safer for your child. For example, they should always swim with an experienced swimmer, wear a helmet while riding a bike and be accompanied by someone who knows how to help if a seizure happens.


Information provided is for general background purposes and is not intended as a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment by a trained professional. You should always consult your physician about any healthcare questions you may have, especially before trying a new medication, diet, fitness program, or approach to healthcare issues.