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2/5: Health blog: How to help someone through a seizure

Jennifer Brown/Online Reporter

Allow me to set the stage for you. You're in a public place with your friends, and at the table next to you an adult falls off their chair.

They have blacked out and are starting to shake—violently. Arms and legs are kicking and they may be hitting their head repeatedly on the floor. At this point, they have lost control and their brain has taken over into a grand mal seizure. Would you know how to help them?

One very important first step is this: Never put anything in their mouth. If possible, remove any food from their mouth. This eliminates the possibility of choking and frees their airway. Use caution, however; they don't have control over their body and they can bite you. It's also good to stabilize the head on a pillow or blanket as much as you can. The tremors should last a few seconds to two minutes at the most. If they last longer, call an ambulance.

Next, make sure the person is as low to the floor as possible. Many people that have frequent grand mal seizures wear helmets because they can drop to the floor at any time. If a person is low to the ground, then the injuries resulting from the seizure will be minimal. If they are in an awkward position, roll them over on their side so their tremors can kick freely. After they awake from the seizure, they may be very sore from the kicking.

Every so often, check that the person is breathing. If they aren't, then administer CPR or call the paramedics. They should wake up after almost three minutes like they are waking up from a nap. They will be exhausted, most rest after going through such an experience. It is also suggested that the individual doesn't drive after a seizure because they may be too exhausted or wiped out from the experience.

Anything can cause a seizure. It can be a stroke, brain tumors or fatigue. It can be stress, a change in eating habits or the cause may be unknown. It's important for you to know that a grand mal seizure is simply this: the individual loses all muscle control, blacks out and drops to the floor. This differs from a petite mal seizure, where the brain just "shuts off" or "checks out" for a short period of time; a simple handclap will bring the person back.

Some of the warning signs for seizures include: daylong severe headache turning into a migraine, dizziness, confusion, balance disruption and lightheadedness. Fatigue, also, is another big trigger for grand mal seizures. I usually describe my lightheadedness as my head floating on clouds, and then a little later a seizure arrives.

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