

Editorial Highlights on Epilepsy

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Epilepsy

A disorder in which nerve cell activity in the brain is disturbed, causing seizures. Epilepsy may occur as a result of a genetic disorder or an acquired brain injury, such as a trauma or stroke. During a seizure, a person experiences abnormal behaviour, symptoms and sensations, sometimes including loss of consciousness. There are few symptoms between seizures. Epilepsy is usually treated by medication and in some cases by surgery, devices or dietary changes.

Epilepsy is a fairly common neurological disorder that affects 65 million people around the world. In the United States, it affects about 3 million people.

Anyone can develop epilepsy, but it's more common in young children and older adults. It occurs slightly more in males than in females.

There's no cure for epilepsy, but the disorder can be managed with medications and other strategies.

The first-line treatment for epilepsy is antiseizure medication. These drugs help reduce the frequency and severity of seizures. They can't stop a seizure that's already in progress, nor is it a cure for epilepsy.

The medication is absorbed by the stomach. Then it travels the bloodstream to the brain. It affects neurotransmitters in a way that reduces the electrical activity that leads to seizures.

Antiseizure medications pass through the digestive tract and leave the body through urine.

There are many antiseizure drugs on the market. Your doctor can prescribe a single drug or a combination of drugs, depending on the type of seizures you have.

If medication can't decrease the number of seizures, another option is surgery. The most common surgery is a resection. This involves removing the part of the brain where the seizures start. Most often, the temporal lobe is removed in a procedure known as temporal lobectomy. In some cases, this can stop seizure activity.

In some cases, you'll be kept awake during this surgery. That's so doctors can talk to you and avoid removing part of the brain that controls important functions such as vision, hearing, speech, or movement.

If the area of the brain is too big or important to remove, there's another procedure called multiple subpial transection, or disconnection. The surgeon makes cuts in the brain to interrupt the nerve pathway. That keeps seizures from spreading to other areas of the brain.

After surgery, some people are able to cut down on antiseizure medications or even stop taking them.

There are risks to any surgery, including a bad reaction to anesthesia, bleeding, and infection. Surgery of the brain can sometimes result in cognitive changes. Discuss the pros and cons of the different procedures with your surgeon and seek a second opinion before making a final decision.

The diet requires a strict balance between fats, carbohydrates, and protein. That's why it's best to work with a nutritionist or dietitian. Children on this diet must be carefully monitored by a doctor.

How to cite this article: Alaa Mostafa Abou-Zeid. "Editorial Highlights on Epilepsy." *J Neurol Disord* 9 (2021): 448

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Received 16 January, 2021; **Accepted** 23 January, 2021; **Published** 30 January, 2021