

Causes of Epilepsy

Everyone has a seizure threshold. People with epilepsy have a lower seizure threshold than others. This means that something that does not cause problems for most people can trigger a seizure for a person with epilepsy. Triggers include stress, lack of sleep, alcohol and flashing lights. But what causes a low seizure threshold and epilepsy in the first place?

Major causes of epilepsy

Damage to the brain

People can develop epilepsy as a result of damage to the brain from a head injury, an infection (like meningitis) or a stroke. Sometimes the injury may have happened years ago. An example is febrile convulsions in a baby that sometimes cause scarring on the brain. This scar tissue can cause epilepsy in later life.

Some people are born with part of their brain not formed properly. This can also be a cause of epilepsy and other neurological conditions.

Idiopathic (no known cause)

Sometimes neurologists cannot find a reason why epilepsy starts. When there is no known cause the person may have been born with a low seizure threshold.

Genetic

Some people will have a history of epilepsy in their family. This is called genetic epilepsy. Current research shows that some types of epilepsy are genetic and others are not. It is rare for genetic epilepsies to be caused by one gene alone. There are usually other genetic and environmental causes as well.

If you have epilepsy the chance of your child developing the condition is generally low (around 4-8%). You can speak to your doctor about this. They can refer you to genetic counsellors who will study your family medical history and try to work out your risk.

For more help and advice call our helpline 0808 800 2200
Or email us at enquiries@epilepsyscotland.org.uk