

After a seizure

Most people recover from a seizure within an hour, and this recovery does not pose any problems. This factsheet details some of the less common symptoms people can experience after a seizure. Carers may find it useful to know what may happen after a seizure.

Post-ictal phase is the medical term for the time immediately after a seizure.

What happens after a seizure?

Immediately after a seizure, during the Post-ictal phase most people take only a short time to become fully aware and back to normal. It is quite common for the person to feel confused after a seizure. Other common symptoms can include headaches, slurred speech, feeling sick, mood changes and tiredness. People often want to sleep or be in a quiet place.

If someone is confused after a seizure it can help to speak to them and tell them what has happened. This will provide reassurance. It can also help if you give someone a quiet place to recover.

If there is a period of confusion it normally lasts for up to an hour, but can last for just minutes or even go on for hours. The person who has had the seizure may be able to talk and answer questions during this period, but they might not remember anything. Sometimes they can perform a fairly complicated task like undressing and going to bed but will not remember doing so. Occasionally people can feel strange, seem different, or appear out of sorts to others for a longer period of time. This difference can last for days.

Sometimes the person can be mistaken for being drunk or on drugs. It can help to wear medical ID jewellery or carry an Epilepsy ID card. This lets ambulance, medical staff or police know the person has epilepsy.

Needing time to recover can have an impact on work. It may mean taking time off work after a seizure. If someone is confused or does not remember things after a seizure they may be more likely to make a mistake. The Equality Act gives people the right to ask for reasonable adjustments to be made at work because of epilepsy. Employers must consider making these.

If the person is in education they may have difficulty learning until they fully recover from a seizure. Schools, colleges and universities should have an epilepsy policy. This outlines what will be done to help and support someone affected by epilepsy. For example what happens if someone misses classes or falls behind with their studies?

Post-ictal psychosis

Although most people will recover quickly from a seizure, in a very few cases the person can then experience post-ictal psychosis a few days later. This is rare and only happens, on occasion, to 18% of people whose epilepsy is not controlled by medication. It is more common in those who experience clusters of tonic-clonic seizures.

Psychosis is a medical term used when someone loses touch with reality. There is an initial recovery period after a seizure (also called the lucid phase) where the person feels normal. This can vary in length, but it is usually more than 6 hours, but can be anywhere from 2 hours to a week. After the recovery period the person may experience delusions or hallucinations. These are often paranoid or fearful. This is called post-ictal psychosis. Post-ictal psychosis can last from 12 hours to more than 3 months, but more usually lasts for 9 or 10 days.

Todd's paresis or post-ictal paralysis

Very occasionally people can experience a period of paralysis after a seizure. This can be a weakness, loss of movement and/or numbness. It usually occurs on one side of the body. It can last from a few minutes to 48 hours. It can also affect speech, vision and hearing and it is possible that this can cause temporary blindness, deafness or an inability to speak.

Todd's paresis can sometimes be confused with a stroke as the symptoms are similar. A stroke requires different medical treatment.

It is important to remember that for most people, the post-ictal phase will pass without any complications. If you are in doubt or worried about any symptoms after a seizure, contact your GP, Epilepsy Specialist Nurse or consultant for medical advice.