

Tonic seizures

Tonic seizures are a type of generalised seizure. Generalised seizures affect all of the brain and cause some loss of consciousness. The name 'tonic' comes from the word 'tone' – meaning muscle tension.

Tonic seizures most often happen when a person is asleep. When someone has a tonic seizure all their muscles suddenly tighten. Their body stiffens and they will fall over unless they are supported or lying down. Breathing can become irregular. Tonic seizures are usually very quick. They normally last less than 20 seconds and the person comes round again very quickly. The person may feel tired after the seizure.

Diagnosis

An EEG test can clearly show these seizures if they happen while the person is being monitored. Eye-witness accounts of the person having a seizure can also provide important information.

Who has tonic seizures?

Tonic seizures are more common in people who have a type of epilepsy called Lennox-Gastaut syndrome, but they can occur in anyone. Lennox-Gastaut Syndrome usually develops in early childhood and is often difficult to treat.

Management

Some people manage good seizure control with anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs). Tonic seizures in Lennox-Gastaut syndrome may become more difficult to control over time. Safety is an issue for people who have tonic seizures because they can often injure themselves if they fall, or if they hit furniture or other hard surfaces during the seizure. During a tonic seizure, a person will usually fall backwards so injuries to the back of the head are common. Some

people who have frequent tonic seizures choose to wear a headguard to protect them from further injury.

Other possible diagnosis

Children with neurological impairments sometimes make movements that could be mistaken for tonic seizures. An EEG test can be used to confirm the diagnosis.