

## **Understanding and treating Epilepsy:**

Referred to as '**Apasmara**' in **Ayurveda**, meaning loss of consciousness, epilepsy, is a serious disorder of the central nervous system that affects both children and adults alike.

A seizure is caused by a sudden burst of excess electrical activity in the brain, causing a temporary disruption in the normal message passing between brain cells. This results in the brain's messages becoming temporarily halted or mixed up.

The brain is responsible for all our bodily functions, so what a person experiences during a seizure will depend on where in the brain the epileptic activity begins and how widely and rapidly it spreads. For this reason, there are many different types of seizure and each person will experience epilepsy in a way that is unique to them.

Seizures can happen at any time and they generally only last a matter of seconds or minutes, after which the brain usually returns to normal.

Sometimes the reason epilepsy develops is obvious: brain damage caused by a difficult birth; a severe blow to the head; a stroke which starves the brain of oxygen; or an infection of the brain such as meningitis. Any of the above situations can cause instability of the neurons.

Sometimes the tendency to have seizures runs in the family. Some people may inherit a lower resistance to seizures than other people. Very occasionally the cause is a brain tumour. However, for most of us - six out of 10, in fact - the exact cause is a mystery.

The main thing to bear in mind is that seizures can be of two types - generalised or partial. What you experience (your symptoms) will depend on where the change in brain activity begins and how widely and rapidly it spreads out.

Generalized seizures involve the whole brain. There are several types, including tonic-clonic, absence and myoclonic.

Partial seizures, as the name suggests, start in just one part of the brain. They can be either simple partial seizures or complex partial seizures but either way the electrical discharge may stay in one spot or may spread to the rest of the brain.

Seizures can involve a momentary loss of consciousness, amnesia, unusual sensations or emotions, and other symptoms. Symptoms that indicate an imminent seizure (called auras) may occur. Similarly, non-convulsive symptoms, including deep sleep, headache, confusion, and muscle soreness (called a postictal state), may follow a generalized seizure. Auras just before the seizure can include smells and visions that other people don't see, patients will be in a dreamy space with an altered state of awareness. In fact those who suffer from epilepsy may well be the visionaries of our world.

Most seizures strike completely out of the blue. However some of us can pinpoint certain factors which spark them off. These include:

# Robert McDowell's Herbal Treatments

---

[www.herbal-treatments.com](http://www.herbal-treatments.com)

---

**Alcohol** - excess can trigger a seizure - even in people without epilepsy.

**Stress** - some of us experience more seizures during periods of anxiety. This may be partly because sleep patterns can be upset at such times. Some stress is part of everyday life - it's best to find ways to manage it, rather than trying to avoid it altogether.

**Patterns of light** - many people believe that watching TV or playing video games can trigger a seizure. This is true in a few people who are sensitive to flickering light, though it's far less common than most people imagine. In fact only about five per cent of people with epilepsy are affected in this way.

**Late nights & lack of sleep** - too many late nights or going without sleep (e.g. if you work shifts or travel across time zones) can trigger seizures. The odd late night shouldn't matter much, but it is best to try to keep regular hours. Experience will teach you what best suits you.

**Illness** - a high temperature (fever) can bring on a seizure in young children if they are ill. This is less likely in adults, however having a minor ailment can reduce a person's seizure threshold, making seizures more likely.

**Hormones** - many women report that their seizures are linked to their menstrual cycle - though no one really knows why. They tend to happen in the week before or first few days of your period.

**Food** - some people with epilepsy claim that certain foods trigger seizures. There is no evidence to suggest that people with epilepsy should avoid certain foods. However, skipping meals and eating an unbalanced diet may be a factor.

Holistic Treatment may include:-

- Acupuncture
- Nervine Herbs - Herbs have a balancing effect on our systems allowing the use of these during the day without excessive drowsiness. The correct combination and dosage can keep a patient relaxed and breathing evenly. Herbs that are calming, and recommended in epilepsy, are Lemon balm, Skullcap, Passionflower, Mugwort, Motherwort, Black Cohosh, Sage and Valerian. Please consult a qualified practitioner as herbs can interact with medications.
- Improve sleep patterns.
- Yoga to reduce anxiety levels.
- Ketogenic diet - The ketogenic diet was developed in the early twentieth century when few drug treatments for epilepsy were available; until recently, it had been used only when drug therapy was ineffective. The dietary approach was based on the observation that ketosis (increased blood levels of chemicals called ketones) is associated with reduction of seizures. According to a 1996 review, the ketogenic diet appears to be very effective in one-third to one-half of epilepsy cases in children, and partially effective in another one-third of cases. It is necessary to be scrupulous

## Robert McDowell's Herbal Treatments

---

[www.herbal-treatments.com](http://www.herbal-treatments.com)

---

in the restriction of carbohydrates because even a very small amount of sugar can cause the body to shift to glucose production and use. Each meal has about four times as much fat as protein or carbohydrate. The amounts of food and liquid at each meal have to be carefully worked out and weighed for each person. Vitamin and mineral supplementation is necessary due to the many deficiencies of this unusual diet. This is not something to be done without professional dietary and medical supervision.

- Nourish the brain - Super Omega 3 oils, Fish oils, Flaxseed oil

Epilepsy can be associated with common allergy-causing foods such as dairy products, oranges, eggs, tomatoes and strawberries, to test if the seizures are related to allergies. Studies have linked epileptic seizures with the diet, and have shown epileptic seizures reduced or eliminated with avoidance of allergens, which as well as the above, can include gluten, food colourings and additives and aspartame.

Many also suggest the following restrictions: No coffee, tea or soda, no choline and no aspartame (artificial sweeteners).

Read about our treatment at:

[http://www.herbal-treatment.net/herbs\\_epilepsy\\_support.html](http://www.herbal-treatment.net/herbs_epilepsy_support.html)