

**Y**ou may not know much about epilepsy— seizure disorders. In fact, you may never have heard of it. Or, you may have heard it referred to as “fits” or “spells.” More than two million Americans have epilepsy, including nearly 400,000 people under age 18 and nearly 350,000 African-Americans.



There are still many old ideas and a lot of confusion about epilepsy and about people with the disorder. But today, because we know more about epilepsy, we know that we don't have to be afraid of it. We know that it can be treated. And we know that people with epilepsy—including teens—are **entitled to respect!**



# EPILEPSY: Let's set the record straight.

## Back in the day...

People didn't know that seizures and epilepsy had a physical cause.

## Today we know that...

- Epilepsy is a brain disorder that signals a malfunction in the way the brain's electrical system works. Epilepsy is **not** mental illness. It's **not** a curse. And it's **not** contagious.
- Seizures are the outward sign of epilepsy. They happen when there's a sudden burst of electrical energy in the brain.

- People can have more than one kind of seizure. Some are hardly noticeable, even to the person experiencing the seizure. Others are more obvious and may involve convulsions, staring spells or brief periods of unconsciousness.
- Some people may experience frequent seizures while others may rarely have seizures. But recurring seizures, whether they happen often or rarely, are considered to be epilepsy.

## Back in the day...

People thought that people with epilepsy should be treated differently.

## Today we know that...

- Everyone has limitations, and teens with epilepsy are no different; however, many teens with epilepsy have proven that they can do just about anything someone without seizures can do.
- Teens with epilepsy don't want to be defined by their seizures. That would be like defining you solely by your hair style, the clothes you wear or the music you listen to.
- Teens with epilepsy are holding it down just like you—managing the hectic life of a teenager. That's something we all should respect.





**Back in the day...**  
People did not know that epilepsy could be treated.

### Today we know that...

- Like asthma and diabetes, epilepsy often is successfully treated with prescription medication or surgery. The medication is not a cure, but it can greatly reduce the number of seizures a person has and how often they have them.
- Working together, a doctor, a person with epilepsy and their family often can develop a treatment plan to help keep seizures under control.
- If you (or someone you know) have seizures and you've never seen a doctor about them, you should do so immediately.

**Back in the day...**  
People thought you should put a spoon, penny, pencil or other object in the mouth during a seizure.

### Today we know that...

You should never **put anything** in the mouth of someone having a seizure. Doing so can cause injury to the teeth, gums or palate. Also, small objects such as a penny can be swallowed and block the airway. Here's what you should do:

#### **For seizures that involve convulsions (shaking):**

- **DON'T** put anything in the mouth or try to hold them down. It is not true that you can swallow your tongue during a seizure.
- Stay calm.
- Move things out of the way.

- Put something soft under the head.
- Loosen anything tight around the neck.
- Turn them gently to one side.

**For seizures that involve blank staring, unusual blinking or chewing, or loss of awareness:**

- Stay calm and speak softly.
- Gently guide them away from danger or from anything hazardous. Don't grab them.
- Stand near them until they are fully aware of their surroundings.





**Now that you know  
more about epilepsy...**



- Pass it on to your friends and family.
- Learn more about health conditions that affect teens. To learn more about epilepsy, visit [www.e2respect.org](http://www.e2respect.org) or call the Epilepsy Foundation at 800-332-1000.
- Get the word out that teens—including teens with epilepsy—are **Entitled to Respect!**

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