



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Managing Epilepsy

Active Epilepsy and Seizure Control in Adults—United States, 2013 and 2015

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[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Kathleen Dooling] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Kathleen Dooling.

Approximately three million people in the U.S. have been diagnosed with epilepsy, a brain disorder that results in seizures.

Rosemarie Kobau is with CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. She's joining us today to discuss the importance of recognizing and treating epilepsy. Welcome to the show, Rosemarie.

[Rosemarie Kobau] Thank you; happy to be here.

[Dr. Dooling] Rosemarie, are all seizures caused by epilepsy?

[Rosemarie Kobau] No. People who have seizures due to epilepsy have a sudden burst of abnormal electrical activity in the brain that causes brief changes in their behavior, awareness, or sensations. But people can have seizures due to other conditions, such as low blood sugar, a high fever, or a heart condition. A single seizure is not considered epilepsy, but people who have epilepsy have repeated episodes of seizures that are not caused by a known condition.

[Dr. Dooling] For people who have epilepsy, are there different types of seizures?

[Rosemarie Kobau] Yes. There are over 30 different types of seizures. How a seizure looks depends on where the seizure is coming from in the brain. Seizures can be divided into two groups—generalized, meaning that they affect the entire brain, and focal, meaning that they affect only a portion of the brain. With generalized seizures, there's a loss of awareness and convulsions of the limbs or body. With focal seizures, there may or may not be loss of awareness and there are no convulsions. A person with epilepsy can have more than one kind of seizure.

[Dr. Dooling] What are some of the risk factors for epilepsy?

[Rosemarie Kobau] Anything that harms the brain can cause epilepsy. Some things that can increase risk for developing epilepsy include having a family history of the disorder; problems during pregnancy or during birth; head injuries; brain tumors; infections, such as meningitis, encephalitis, and herpes infections; and other conditions, such as stroke and Alzheimer's disease can cause epilepsy. But for the majority of people with epilepsy, there's no known cause and researchers are still studying possible risk factors.

[Dr. Dooling] Is there a cure?

[Rosemarie Kobau] At this time, there is no cure for epilepsy.

[Dr. Dooling] How is epilepsy treated or managed?

[Rosemarie Kobau] Epilepsy's most often treated with medicines designed to stop seizures, and the majority of people can control their seizures with medicines alone, but sometimes medicines don't work. Brain surgery is another effective treatment option for some people. Surgeons can remove the part of the brain that's susceptible to seizures, stopping the seizures entirely. Neuromodulation is another option and this is a therapy that involves using a device to send small electrical currents to the brain, and these currents, or signals, make the brain cells work the way they're supposed to, like getting back to their normal state. For some people, a special diet called the ketogenic diet is an option if medications fail to control seizures, and this is a strict diet that's rich in fats and low in carbohydrates. And finally, it's important to emphasize that people with epilepsy can and should learn ways to better control their seizures by practicing healthy lifestyle behaviors, like getting good sleep and reducing stress because we know these are common seizure triggers for many people.

[Dr. Dooling] Where can listeners get more information about epilepsy?

[Rosemarie Kobau] They can go to cdc.gov/epilepsy.

[Dr. Dooling] Thanks, Rosemarie. I've been talking today with Rosemarie Kobau about the symptoms and treatment of epilepsy.

Although there is no cure, it can be managed with medication and lifestyle changes to avoid triggers, which include stress and insufficient sleep. If you or someone you know has experienced a seizure, seek medical care. Early diagnosis and treatment can improve the chances of controlling epilepsy.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Kathleen Dooling for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.