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Understanding **Epilepsy**



What is Epilepsy?

Epilepsy is a chronic disorder in which people tend to have recurrent seizures (fits). Seizures are caused by a sudden surge, technically an overload, in the brain's electrical activity. This causes a temporary disturbance in the messaging systems between brain cells. Every bodily function occurs by messaging systems in our brain. What an Epilepsy patient experiences during seizures depends on which part of the brain the seizure activity emanates from and how quickly it spreads to other areas.

What are the major types of seizures?

Sometimes it is hard to tell when a person is having a seizure. A person having a seizure may seem confused or look like they are staring at something that isn't there. Other seizures can cause a person to fall, shake and become unaware of surrounding actions.

Seizures are classified into two groups:

- Generalised seizures – affect both sides of the brain
- Focal seizures – affect just one area of the brain. These seizures are also called partial seizures

A person with epilepsy can have more than one kind of seizure.



How long do seizures usually last?

Usually, a seizure lasts from a few seconds to a few minutes, depending on the type of seizure.

What causes Epilepsy?

Epilepsy can be caused by different conditions that affect a person's brain. Some known causes include:

- Stroke
- Brain tumour
- Brain infection, like neurocysticercosis
- Traumatic brain injury or head injury
- Loss of oxygen to the brain (for example, during birth)

For 2 in 3 people, the cause of Epilepsy is unknown. This type of Epilepsy is called Idiopathic.



How can a person prevent Epilepsy?

Sometimes Epilepsy can be prevented. These are some of the most common ways to reduce the risk of developing Epilepsy:

- Have a healthy pregnancy. Some problems during pregnancy and childbirth may lead to Epilepsy. Follow a prenatal care plan with your healthcare provider to keep you and your baby healthy
- Prevent brain injuries
- Lower the chances of stroke and heart disease
- Be up-to-date on your vaccinations
- Wash your hands and prepare food safely to prevent infections such as cysticercosis

How is Epilepsy diagnosed?

A person who has a seizure for the first time should talk to a medical expert. The expert will talk to the person about the existing medical condition and try to ascertain the cause of the seizure. Many people who have seizures take tests such as brain scans for a closer look at the condition.



How is Epilepsy treated?

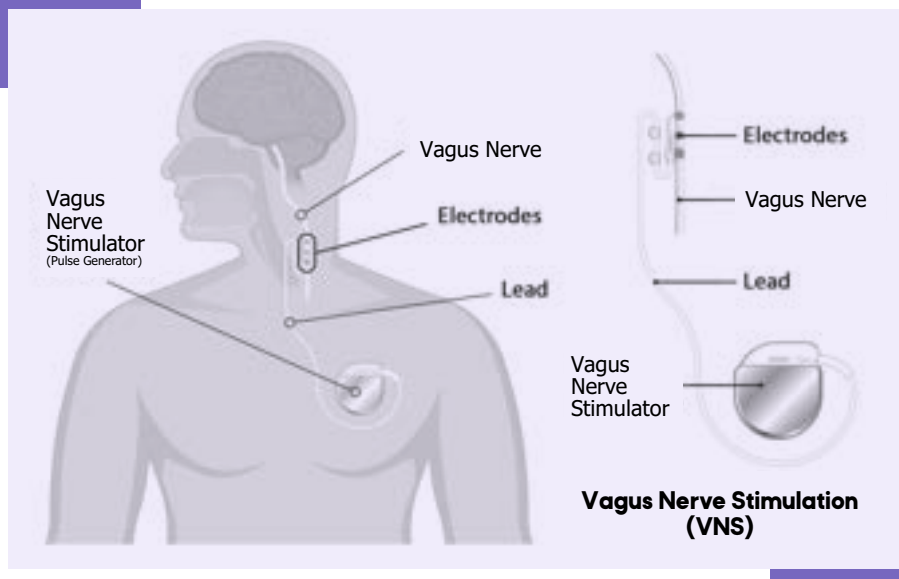
The most common treatments for Epilepsy are:

Medicine

Anti-seizure drugs are medicines that limit the spread of seizures in the brain. Your doctor will change the amount of medicine or prescribe a new drug if needed to find the best treatment plan. Medicines work for about 2 in 3 people with Epilepsy.

Surgery

When seizures come from a single area of the brain (focal seizures), surgery to remove that particular area may stop future seizures or make them easier to control with medicine. Epilepsy surgery is mostly performed when the seizure focus is located in the temporal lobe of the brain.



Other Treatments

When medicines do not work and surgery is not possible, other treatments can help. These include Vagus Nerve Stimulation, where an electrical device is placed, or implanted, under the skin on the upper chest to send signals to a large nerve in the neck. Another option is ketogenic diet, a high fat, low carbohydrate diet with limited calories.