

# Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog

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Can stress cause seizures? To what degree is stress affecting your seizures? How important is it to effectively manage your stress? Stress is your body's reaction to a demanding situation. In small doses, stress can be a positive thing. It can help you finish your project with a burst of energy, or to avoid a dangerous situation.

In large doses, however, stress can cause a cascade of problems — even seizures. For people who have epilepsy or seizures, this stress may do more than affect their mental health. It may even put them at an increased risk of having seizures. Find out how stress can trigger seizures, and what you can do to help prevent them.

## **Why do some people have more seizures when under stress?**

Seizures can take many forms, but there is not a single type of seizure that is known as a “stress seizure.” Stress may, however, play a role in triggering many types of seizures. Since everyone experiences stress differently, it can be hard to know how many people have seizures triggered by stress, but stress is the most commonly self-reported event that occurs before a seizure.

## **How are seizures diagnosed?**

Epilepsy is usually diagnosed when you have multiple seizures in a certain period of time. Epilepsy is considered a spectrum, and individuals with epilepsy can have anywhere from one seizure occasionally to hundreds of seizures each day. Stress and fatigue may increase the frequency of some types of seizures.

Seizures are diagnosed through a combination of physical assessment, medical history, and imaging studies. Your doctor will ask about:

- family history of seizures
- prior seizures
- medications you are taking
- drug or alcohol use
- head traumas
- history of stroke
- metabolic disorders like diabetes or kidney disease
- fevers
- recent confusion or change in behavior
- sleep habits

After taking your history and doing a physical examination, your doctor may order one or more of the following tests to learn more about your seizure activity:

- an electroencephalogram (EEG) to measure brain waves

- blood testing
- a spinal tap to rule out infection
- toxicology screening
- a CT scan or MRI scan to rule out tumors or other physical abnormalities in the brain

### **Can you prevent seizures triggered by stress?**

Maintaining good overall physical health and mental wellbeing may help reduce your risk of experiencing a seizure if stress affects you.

Some examples of things you can do include:

- take any seizure medication as prescribed
- reduce alcohol consumption
- avoid taking illegal drugs
- talk with a friend or therapist
- maintain a daily routine
- follow a regular sleep schedule
- exercise
- eat a healthy diet
- keep a journal of things that bother you or lead to stress seizures
- participate in hobbies or other outlets for stress
- practice relaxation activities like yoga, tai chi, or meditation

### **What are common risk factors for seizures triggered by stress?**

Stress can be a difficult risk factor to measure or quantify. What is stressful to one person may not be to another, and we cannot all tolerate the same level of stress.

There are many ways stress can manifest, and a number of things that can make it worse. Risk factors that could lead to a stress-triggered seizures include:

- sleep deprivation
- depression and anxiety
- illness
- too much caffeine
- alcohol or drug use
- skipping meals or having a poor diet

### **What are the symptoms of seizures?**

Seizure symptoms vary based on the type of seizure you have. The symptoms can range in severity and differ based on what part of your brain is being affected during the seizure episode.

Examples of symptoms during a seizure include:

- unusual sensations
- staring off into space
- nausea
- headache
- dizziness
- repeating words
- noticing strange smells (olfactory hallucinations)
- visual disturbances

- making odd or repetitive movements
- uncontrollable shaking or jerking of one body part or the whole body
- drooling or foaming at the mouth
- loss of bowel or bladder control

### **How are seizures treated?**

If you have epilepsy and your seizures are being triggered by stress, you should consider working to decrease or avoid stressful situations. You might also think about working with your doctor to find an effective medication regimen.

There are a number of medications that can be used to control seizures, and additional medications may be appropriate to help you deal with stress, depression, or anxiety. Talk with your doctor or a mental health professional if you are having trouble coping with seizures or daily stress.

If you do not have epilepsy but are experiencing non-epileptic seizures brought on by stress, there are a number of treatments that may help. These include:

- medications to address anxiety or depression
- ruling out physical problems that could be increasing stress
- counseling measures like cognitive behavioral therapy
- lifestyle changes

### **What is the outlook for people who have seizures triggered by stress?**

If you have seizures, stress may be a potential trigger. There isn't enough research to support stress-reduction techniques as a way to control seizures; however, there's some evidence that it may eventually be used to help reduce seizure frequency. Making positive lifestyle changes can improve your quality of life and help you cope with chronic epilepsy and other medical conditions. Talk with your doctor if you need more help managing seizures or your stress levels.

### **The bottom line**

While stress may not cause seizures, it may play a role in both epileptic and non-epileptic seizures. Managing stress is an important part of managing your seizures and improving your overall health. Lifestyle changes like getting enough sleep, maintaining a healthy diet and regular exercise, and meditation, can all help control stress and may reduce seizure frequency.

*Editor's Note: The Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog will be distributed and posted weekly.*  
Always remember – CARPE DIEM – SEIZE THE DAY!

[Steve.Hutton@epilepsy-ohio.org](mailto:Steve.Hutton@epilepsy-ohio.org)