

Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog

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A complex partial seizure is also known as a focal impaired awareness seizure or a focal onset impaired awareness seizure. This type of seizure starts in a single area of the brain. This area is usually, but not always, the temporal lobe of the brain.

While it is most common in people with epilepsy, this type of seizure has been known to occur in people with cerebral palsy. It includes uncontrolled movement of limbs or other body parts. These seizures are usually very short, and the person having the seizure will be unaware of their surroundings. They may also become unconscious for a brief period of time.

Complex partial seizures and epilepsy

For those with epilepsy, this is the most common type of seizure. But while complex partial seizures are often related to epilepsy, this is not the only reason for someone to have seizures.

Symptoms of complex partial seizures

A complex partial seizure can have multiple possible symptoms. However, these symptoms may occur during one seizure and not another. Complex partial seizures normally only last a few minutes. Seizures beginning in the frontal lobe area of the brain are usually shorter than those that start in the temporal lobe area.

Symptoms will often start abruptly, and the person experiencing the seizure may not know they have had one. The person may:

- stare blankly or look like they are daydreaming.
- be unable to respond.
- wake from sleep suddenly.
- swallow, smack their lips, or otherwise move their mouth repetitively.
- pick at things like the air, clothing, or furniture.
- say words repetitively.
- scream, laugh, or cry.
- perform actions that can cause potential danger to themselves, like walking in front of moving cars or removing all or portions of their clothing.
- perform movements like they are riding a bicycle.
- be unaware, either partially or totally, of their surroundings.
- hallucinate.
- try to hurt themselves.
- experience confusion when the seizure ends.
- be unable to remember the seizure when it is over.

Causes of complex partial seizures

While epilepsy is one of the most common causes, there are other conditions that can cause a complex partial seizure. Some of these conditions are:

- psychological distress or trauma.
- neurologic conditions.
- extreme stress.
- anxiety and depression.
- Autism.
- other medical conditions related to the brain.
- damage caused prior to birth.
- Neurofibromatosis.

Common triggers

A complex partial seizure can happen anytime and usually without much warning. They can even occur when the person is in the middle of an activity. Sometimes the person will have an aura right before having a complex partial seizure. An aura is also called a simple partial seizure. It can act as a warning signal that a bigger seizure is coming.

There are some additional factors that can trigger a seizure, including:

- flashing lights.
- low blood sugar.
- high fever.
- reactions to some medications.

Diagnosing a complex partial seizure

Before deciding on treatment, a doctor will need to confirm that a person is having complex partial seizures. The doctor will need as many details as possible from the person having the seizures as well as from someone who has seen these episodes on a number of occasions. The doctor will need to know what happens before, during, and after each episode.

If a doctor suspects a complex partial seizure, they will usually order a diagnostic test to confirm. An electroencephalogram (EEG) may be done initially. However, the EEG will usually need to record a seizure to be accurate. Other tests that may be given to look for any potential cause of the seizures are a CT scan and an MRI. A blood test and neurological exam may be done as well. These may help the doctor find a cause (if there is a recognizable cause) without seeing an actual seizure while testing.

How are they treated and managed?

There are various types of treatment for complex partial seizures once the condition has been diagnosed. The following are some of the possible treatment options:

- antiepileptic drugs (AEDs).
- stimulation of the vagus nerve.
- responsive neurostimulation.
- surgery.
- dietary changes.

The type of treatment used is determined by the cause of the seizures, other medical conditions, and other factors.

Associated health conditions

A complex partial seizure can happen to anyone. However, there are some medical conditions that are more prone to these types of seizures. These medical conditions include:

- epilepsy (most common).
- cerebral palsy.
- infection in the brain.
- brain injury.
- tumor in the brain.
- stroke.
- some heart conditions.

Sometimes a complex partial seizure will happen to someone without any known medical conditions. There is not always a cause that can be determined in some cases of complex partial seizures.

Outlook

Once diagnosed, seizures — including complex partial seizures — can be managed through a variety of treatment options. In some cases, children will outgrow the seizures. If you think that you or someone you know is having seizures, it is important to talk to a doctor for proper diagnosis and treatment.

You should contact a medical professional immediately if someone you know is having a seizure and any of the following is true:

- this is the person's first seizure.
- the seizure lasts more than five minutes.
- the person has a high fever.
- the person does not become conscious after the seizure is over.
- the person has diabetes.
- the person is or might be pregnant.

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

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