

Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog

Editor's Note: Content presented in the Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog is for awareness and informational purposes only, and it is not meant to be a diagnostic tool.

It can be hard to watch your child have a focal onset seizure, but it helps to remember that these are not usually harmful. And if you follow an action plan, you can help your child get through it safely. Whether your child has a focal aware seizure (formerly called a simple partial seizure) or a focal impaired awareness seizure (formerly called a complex partial or psychomotor seizure), your role is the same: To calm yourself and then comfort and watch over your child.

What Steps Should I Take If My Child Has a Seizure?

When your child starts to go through a focal onset seizure or shows warning signs, called an aura, follow these steps:

- Take a deep breath. It is normal for you to feel frightened, even if it is not the first time your child has had a seizure. But you will be better able to move through the next steps if you are calm. Also, quickly note the time. This will be important as the seizure progresses.
- Create a safe space for your child. If your child is sitting or standing when the seizure starts or when they feel an aura, encourage them to lie down on one side with something soft like a pillow or folded sweater under their head. This will help to keep them from choking on their saliva.
- If it is not possible for them to lie down, clear the area of tripping hazards and dangerous objects, like anything with sharp edges. If they start to wander, stay one step ahead mentally to keep them from danger, such as stairs, street traffic, or a swimming pool. Their vision and other senses could be temporarily affected, so you need to be their eyes and ears.

These steps are especially important if your child has a focal impaired awareness seizure. In this type of seizure, they are not conscious of their surroundings, even if they look awake.

If your child is in a pool or even the bath when the seizure happens, support their body in a back float position with their head above the surface. Try to get them out of the water as soon as possible and get help.

Make your child as comfortable as possible. If they wear glasses, take them off if you can. Loosen any tight clothing. Talk in a soothing voice and let them know they are safe. With a focal aware seizure, your child is likely to respond to you as you comfort them. But they might not hear you or be able to respond, especially with a focal impaired awareness seizure. You might gently repeat what you are saying as often as needed.

Stay next to your child. Having you close will reassure your child. You will be in the right place to help prevent any injury and to comfort them when the seizure is over. Plus, you can see how the seizure unfolds and share those details with your child's doctor.

This could be the right time to take a video of the seizure on your phone too. Keep noting the time so you can write down how long the seizure lasted. Seizures usually stop by themselves in a few minutes. Your child should start to respond within 30 minutes.

Help your child recover. Once the seizure is over, if your child is confused, calmly explain what happened. They may be tired and want to sleep for a few hours or have a mild headache and just need some rest. They might need clean clothes since some children throw up or soil their underwear during a seizure. Be matter of fact about this so they will not feel embarrassed.

Know when to call 911. Get emergency help for any of these situations:

- Your child has trouble breathing during the seizure and their color changes.
- The seizure lasts more than 5 minutes and you do not have their rescue medication, if they use it, handy.
- Your child starts to choke on blood or vomit.
- Your child falls or is injured during the seizure and needs first aid for a possible broken bone or deep cut.
- The seizure happens in water.
- You do not get any response from your child within 30 minutes after the seizure.

What to Avoid

Keep these precautions in mind as the seizure progresses:

- Do not attempt to give your child anything by mouth. During an active seizure, they can choke on food, medicine, and even plain water. Also, if you try to open your child's mouth, you could injure their gums or even break teeth. Wait until your child is completely back to normal before you offer anything.
- Do not shout or make quick movements. These can alarm your child. Do your best to keep them calm, not threatened, or alarmed.
- Do not physically restrain your child unless you have no alternative to keep them safe. If your child wanders around, try to make the area as safe as possible. Only move them if they are in danger where they are, like near stairs. If you need to touch your child for any reason, approach gently from one side and continue to speak softly.

Keep a Seizure Log

A detailed record of your child's seizures helps your doctor identify the type or types that your child has and prescribe the right medications. Basic things to note are when it happened, how long it lasted, and what happened before, during, and after.

Sometimes, seizure activity affects a single muscle group, like a leg or the fingers. This is a sign of a simple focal seizure. With this type, your child may also sweat, feel sick, or become pale but not lose consciousness.

If your child looks like they are awake but does not respond or remember what happened, they might have had a focal impaired awareness seizure. With this type, you may see your child smack their lips, run, scream, cry, or laugh.

Before a seizure, your child may have an aura, a warning sign that it is about to happen. This is more common with a complex focal seizure. An aura may involve feelings, like a sense of doom, fear, or euphoria. There may also be changes in their hearing, sense of smell, or vision, such as flashing lights. Note if your child says they felt any of these things or if you notice signs that they have happened.

Here are other things to write down:

- Was your child asleep or awake when the seizure started? If awake, what were they doing?
- What alerted you to the seizure?
- Did the seizure start gradually or all at once?
- What parts of their body were involved?
- Were there any twitching or jerking movements?
- Did your child's head turn to one side?
- Was their body limp or stiff?
- Was there noticeable eye movement?
- Did the color or feel of your child's skin change in any way?
- Did your child's breathing change?
- Did they respond to you during the event?
- Did they vomit, pee, or have a bowel movement during or after the seizure?
- After the seizure, did your child have any physical weakness?
- Were they alert, drowsy, or confused afterward?
- Has your child missed a dose of medication?
- All these details are clues that your child's doctor can use to help your child in the future.

Always check with your neurologist or epileptologist for additional information regarding focal seizures.

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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