

students with epilepsy

What is epilepsy?

Epilepsy is a neurological condition that causes abnormal electrical activity in the brain. These disruptions interfere with how nerve cells communicate, leading to seizures. A single seizure does not mean a child has epilepsy. Children with epilepsy experience repeated seizures over time. Seizures can affect movement, thinking, and emotions. There are two main types:

- **Generalized seizures:** Involve the entire brain
- **Partial seizures:** Affect only part of the brain

Some children may experience both types. During a seizure, a child may lose consciousness or move uncontrollably. Milder seizures may cause confusion or make them unaware of their surroundings. Some seizures can be hard to recognize, as the child may blink or stare into space before quickly return to normal activity.

Treatment

Most children respond well to medication. In some cases, surgery may be needed to remove the part of the brain causing seizures. For children who don't respond to medication, other treatments such as the ketogenic diet (high in fat and protein, low in carbohydrates) can help manage seizures effectively.

How can epilepsy affect a student at school?

The most common school-related challenges for students with epilepsy include:

- **Academic:** frequent absences, increased risk of learning disabilities, memory, attention, and processing
- **Social/Emotional:** social withdrawal or isolation, low self-esteem, anxiety, behavioral issues, often linked to medication side effects
- **Physical:** drowsiness or hyperactivity, confusion or disorientation

How can schools support students with epilepsy?

Academic

- Start academic interventions under **Section 504** or **IDEA** (Other Health Impairment).
- Allow **extra time** for assignments, projects, quizzes, and tests.
- Assign a manageable **workload** focused on **quality over quantity**.
- Use **organizational tools** such as checklists, planners, and visual schedules.
- Maintain a **structured and predictable** classroom environment.
- Use **multi-sensory teaching methods** (visual, auditory, tactile) and repetition.
- Provide **printed copies of notes**, highlighted materials, and recorded lessons.
- Offer **preferential seating** to reduce distractions.

Social and Emotional

- Create opportunities for **academic and social success** and highlight the student's strengths to build confidence.
- Limit **competitive activities** to reduce stress and prevent discouragement.
- Provide **counseling or emotional** support as needed.
- Implement **behavior intervention** plans when needed.
- With parent consent, **educate peers** to promote understanding.

Physical

- Monitor the student during **physical activities** and recess.
- Maintain **consistent communication** with families (emails, progress notes, conferences).
- Allow **rest breaks** after a seizure.
- Schedule **time for medication** during the school day.
- Train staff on **seizure response** procedures.
- Provide **safety equipment** as needed (helmets, padding, life vests).
- Use a **buddy system** in classrooms, hallways, and during field trips and recess.

More Resources

- **American Epilepsy Society**
aesnet.org
- **Epilepsy Foundation**
epilepsy.org
- **Nemours Kids Health**
kidshealth.org

SCHOOL SERVICES

For more information, visit childrens.com/school-services

