EPILEPSY
A
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

This is an alphabetical guide to the terms used by doctors in describing symptoms and treatment of epilepsy.

Its main purpose is to provide an easy reference for patients. It can be used by them when they are puzzled by medical terms which they hear when visiting their consultant or general practitioner.

It is possible that confusion could arise with the use of generic and trade names for the numerous drugs used in the treatment of epilepsy. It is hoped that the cross referencing in this list should help solve this problem.

It is not intended to be a comprehensive study of epilepsy. It is merely a summary of terms which, it is hoped, will lead to further reading.
**absence seizures**
There is loss of consciousness but the person experiencing the seizure does not fall or convulse. Poplarly but incorrectly referred to as “petit mal” seizures.

**active epilepsy**
The person with the condition continues to experience seizures.

**acetazolamide**
The generic name for the drug Diamox®

**acetazolamide modified release**
The generic name for the drug Diamix SR®

**ACTH**
Adrenocorticotropic hormone. Can be helpful in treatment of infantile spasms when the usual antiepileptic drugs are having little effect.

**adult onset seizures**
Seizures which commence for the first time in adult life.

**adversive seizure**
A partial seizure which normally results in movement of the head, eyes and arm.

**aetiology of epilepsy**
The causes of epilepsy.

**ambulatory monitoring**
The use of a portable EEG system which allows continuous EEG recordings to be taken over a 24 hour or longer period.

**anticonvulsant**
A drug used to control convulsive seizures.

**antiepileptic medication**
A drug prescribed to control epileptic seizures, either convulsive, non-convulsive or both.

**astatic seizure**
See akinetic seizure.

**ataxia**
Loss of co-ordination.

**atonic seizure**
See akinetic seizure.

**aura**
The first symptom of an epileptic seizure, in the form of a physical sensation – sometimes a prior warning to the person of the onset of a seizure.

**automatisms**
Confused semi-purposeful movements usually lasting for a few minutes but occasionally lasting an hour or more.

**benzodiazepines**
The generic name for a group of drugs including - Mogadon®, Valium®, Rivotril® and Frisium®.
break-through seizures
Seizures which occur unexpectedly following a long period of seizure control.

carbamazepine
The generic name of the antiepileptic drug Tegretol®.

carbamazepine modified release
The generic name of the antiepileptic drug Tegretol Retard®

catalepsy
A state where the muscles remain in a semi-rigid state which could last for several hours. Frequently associated with narcolepsy. It is not epilepsy.

catamenial epilepsy
Epileptic seizures occurring at the time of or just before menstrual periods.

CAT scan
Computerised Axial Tomographic scan. A hi-tech computerised X-ray of the brain. Also known as a CT scan.

Cerebral lesion
A structural abnormality in the brain.

Classification of seizures
An internationally agreed system of classifying different types of seizure.

clobazam
The generic name of an antiepileptic drug Frisium®.

clonazepam
The generic name of an antiepileptic drug Rivotril®.

Clonic movements
Twitches and generalised rhythmic muscular movements associated with seizures.

Complex partial seizures
Seizures which often arise from the temporal lobe of the brain and in which consciousness is impaired.

Compliance
To conscientiously take drug therapy as and when prescribed.

Convulsion
Violent jerking of muscles. Also called “fit” or “seizure.”

Congenital epilepsy
Epilepsy which has been present from birth.

Convulex®
The trade name for the drug valproic acid

cryptogenic epilepsy
Epilepsy having no obvious cause.

CT head scan
Computerised Tomographic scan. See CAT scan.
déjà vu
A feeling of repeating a previous experience. It may be an aura or a temporal lobe seizure.

**Diamox®**
The trade name for the antiepileptic drug acetazolamide

**Diazemuls®**
A trade name for the drug diazepam

diazepam
The generic name of drugs used to stop prolonged seizures ("status epilepticus"). The trade names of this preparation are Valium®, Diazemuls® or Stesolid®.

differential diagnosis
A possible alternative diagnosis to epilepsy.

diphenyl hydantoin
A generic name for the drug Epanutin®. Also known generally as phenytoin.

diurnal seizures
Seizures occurring in the daytime.

driving restrictions
Statutory requirements which determine whether a person with epilepsy may hold a driving licence or have it withdrawn.

drug interactions
The effect that different drugs have on each other.

drug level measurement
Tests to establish the level of a drug in the blood.

drug side effects
The unwanted effects which drugs may produce when used in treatment.

**ECT**
Electro Convulsive Therapy. A technique rarely used in psychiatric medicine which is used to induce convulsions. It plays no part in the treatment of epilepsy.

**EEG**
Electroencephalogram. A test which measures the electrical activity of the brain, used in the investigation and management of epilepsy.

**Emeside®**
A trade name for the drug ethosuximide

**Epanutin®**
The trade name of the drug phenytoin

epilepsy
The name given to the condition in which people are subject to recurrent, unprovoked seizures.

epilepsy associations
Charitable organisations which exist to help those who have epilepsy and their families.
epilepsy centres
Centres offering residential care for those with severe epilepsy.

Epilim®
Trade name of the drug sodium valproate

ethosuximide
The generic name for the drugs Zarontin® and Emeside®.

febrile convulsion
A seizure occurring in a child under the age of five and associated with a rise in the child’s temperature.

fit
A word frequently used instead of “seizure” or “convulsion.”

focal motor seizure
A seizure arising from a part of the brain which controls movement. If it arises in the part controlling the movement of the left arm then that arm will move without control during the seizure.

focal onset
The seizure is clearly identified as starting in a particular part of the brain.

focal sensory seizure
An epileptic seizure which involves feelings such as tingling sensations rather than convulsive movement. There is no loss of consciousness.

Frisium®
The trade name for the drug clobazam

frontal lobe seizure
A seizure which has its origin in the frontal lobe of the brain.

gabapentin
The generic name of the antiepileptic drug Neurontin®,

Gabitril®
The trade name for the drug tiagabine

Gardenal®
A trade name for the drug phenobarbitone,

generalised seizure
Seizures which involve abnormal electrical activity across the whole brain. There is always a loss of consciousness. Tonic-clonic (grand mal) and absence (petit mal) seizures are examples of generalised seizures.

generic name
The chemical name of a drug.

general inheritance
Condition directly passed on from one or both parents.

grand mal seizure
Popular term for what is correctly called a tonic-clonic seizure.

gum hypertrophy
A possible side effect of phenytoin whereby the gums overgrow, the teeth become unsightly and may bleed.
hirsutism
A possible side effect of phenytoin which results in an excess growth of body and facial hair.

Hypnovel®
The trade name for the drug midazolam

hyperventilation seizures
Seizures which are provoked by over breathing particularly absence seizures.

ictus
Latin for “stroke” but also meaning “fit,” “convulsion” or “seizure.”

ictal
Relating to a “fit,” “convulsion” or “seizure.”

idiopathic epilepsy
Epilepsy with no known cause. Now recognised to have genetic causes.

ILAE
International League Against Epilepsy.

incidence of epilepsy
The number of new diagnoses of epilepsy occurring in a year in a population of 1,000. The time limit is usually one year.

infantile spasms
Seizures occurring in infants commonly between four and nine months and rarely after twelve months. See also Salaam attacks.

ischaemic attacks
Stroke like episodes sometimes often mistakenly diagnosed as being epilepsy. It is the result of an inadequate flow of blood to the brain.

interictal period
The time between seizures

intractable epilepsy
Epilepsy which is very difficult or nearly impossible to control satisfactorily.

intramuscular medication
Drugs injected directly into muscle tissue.

intravenous medication
Drugs introduced by injection directly into a vein.

Jacksonian march or seizure
The type of seizure called after the English neurologist Hughlings Jackson, now referred to as focal motor seizures. The seizure begins in the fingers or toes and spreads or moves (“marches”) up the limb to involve the whole limb, or the whole of one side of the body.

Janz Syndrome
Juvenile myoclonic epilepsy.

Keppra®
The trade name for the drug levetiracetam
ketogenic diet
A high fat diet sometimes recommended when drugs fail to control seizures.

Lennox-Gastaut Syndrome
A childhood epileptic disorder in which the child has frequent seizures of different kinds and has severe learning difficulties.

Lamictal®
The trade name of the drug lamotrigine,

lamotrigine
The generic name of an antiepileptic drug Lamictal®.

lesion
Disease of, or damage to part of the body.

levetiracetam
The generic name for the drug Keppra®

lobe
Region of the brain which controls or co-ordinates specific activities of the body. Each side of the brain has four lobes – frontal, parietal, temporal and occipital.

lorazepam
A drug which is used when a seizure is prolonged (“status epilepticus”). It is given intravenously.

Lyrica®
The trade name for the drug pregabalin

MedicAlert® pendant
A small bracelet/necklace worn to advise that the person has a specific medical condition, including epilepsy.

midazolam
The generic name for the drug Hypnovel®

monotherapy

motor seizures
Seizures which begin with localised movements of the body.

MRI scan
Magnetic Resonance Imaging. A hi-tech test used to obtain highly defined images of the brain.

myoclonic seizures
Seizures typified by strong muscular jerks.

myoclonus, benign infantile
Muscular jerks in infants occurring when the child is awake or asleep.

myoclonus, sleep
Muscular jerks during sleep. They are not seizures.

mysoline
The generic name for the drug Primidone®.
narcolepsy
Continually and suddenly falling asleep. Not connected with epilepsy.

neurologist
A doctor specialising in neurological disorders of adults, including epilepsy.

Neurontin®
The trade name of the drug gabapentin

neonatal seizures
Seizures in newly born infants.

night terrors
Severe nightmares, sometimes mistaken as being epilepsy.

nocturnal seizures
Seizures which occur when the person is asleep.

non-convulsive seizures
Epileptic seizures which do not involve any convulsive movements.

NEAD
Non Epileptic Attack Disorder. Events occur which resemble epileptic seizures but in fact not related to epilepsy. These events are vary often of psychological origin.

occipital lobe seizures
Seizures arising from the occipital lobe of the brain.

oxcarbazepine
The generic name for the drug Trileptal®

neurologist, paediatric
A doctor specialising in neurological disorders of children, including epilepsy.

paraldehyde
A drug used to stop prolonged seizures (“status epilepticus”). It is usually introduced rectally.

partial seizures
Seizures which initially arise in only one part of the brain.

peri-menstrual seizures
Seizures occuring around the time of menstruation.

PET scanning
Positron Emission Tomography. A newly developed hi-tech diagnostic test which can be used to identify areas of the brain that are the cause of seizures.

petit mal
The popular name given incorrectly to generalised absence seizures.

phenobarbitone
A long established antiepileptic drug now rarely prescribed as a drug of first choice

phenytoin
The generic name of the drug Epanutin®, manufactured by Parke-Davis Research Laboratories.
photosensitive epilepsy
Seizures which are provoked by a stimulus of light (usually flashing), television or certain video/computer patterns.

plasma concentration
The concentration of a drug in blood plasma.

polypharmacy or polytherapy
Using more than one drug to control seizures.

postictal period
The period of time following the cessation of a seizure.

post-traumatic epilepsy
Seizures resulting from injury to the brain.

prednisone or prednisilone
A steroid drug that may be used in certain types of epilepsy if seizures are not being controlled by the usual antiepileptic drugs.

pregabalin
The generic name for the drug Lyrica®

prevalence of epilepsy
The number of cases of epilepsy in every 1,000 of the population. In the UK it is estimated as being 130 per 1,000 population

pre-menstrual epilepsy
Seizures which occur prior to a woman’s monthly period. Also called catamenial epilepsy.

primary generalised seizure
A generalised seizure without any warning symptoms.

primidone
It is the generic name of the drug Mysoline®.

prognosis
The future outlook.

Prominal®
A trade name for the drug phenobarbitone.

prophylactic medicine
Medicine which is given to prevent the occurrence of a problem rather than to treat it when it occurs.

pseudo seizures
Convulsive movements which resemble an epileptic seizure but which are not, in fact, epileptic. See NEAD

psychomotor seizures
Seizures which arise from the temporal lobe of the brain.

rectal medication
The introduction of drugs directly via the rectum.

reflex epilepsies
Seizures which are provoked by a specific stimulus, e.g. flashing lights, reading, eating.
refractory epilepsy
epilepsy that is unresponsive to treatment

remission
A period without seizures, usually greater than a year

Rivotril®
The trade name for the drug clonazepam

rufinamide
The generic name for the drug Inovelon®

Sabril®
The trade name for the drug vigabatrin

salaam attacks
Seizures occurring in infants and also called infantile spasms. The infant’s head suddenly and forcefully bends forward while the knees bend and the arms flex, or extend.

secondarily generalised seizures
Seizures in which the progression is from being partial (either simple or complex) at the outset, to becoming generalised in their conclusion.

seizure
Another word for “fit” or “convulsion.”

sensory seizures
Seizures which are associated with sensations or feelings such as tingling or warmth in one part of the body, or with an unusual taste, or with abdominal pain/discomfort.

serum levels
Measurements of drug levels in blood serum.

simple partial seizures
Seizures which affect only one part of the body (e.g. one side of the face or one limb, or one side of the body) and in which consciousness is normal or unimpaired.

sodium valproate
The generic name of the antiepileptic drug Epilim®.

sodium valproate modified release
The generic name for the drug Epilim Chrono®

S.O.S Talisman
Jewellery showing medical information details.

spike/wave activity
Findings on the EEG which are typical of some forms of epileptic activity.

status epilepticus
A dangerous condition where one seizure follows another without the person regaining consciousness or in which the seizure is prolonged.

stesolid
A preparation of the drug diazepam. It is administered rectally in the treatment of status epilepticus.
symptomatic epilepsy
Seizures which are a symptom of some underlying brain disorder.

syncopal attacks
Simple faints, sometimes misinterpreted as being epilepsy.

Tegretol®
The trade name for the drug carbamazepine

Tegretol Retard®
The trade name for the drug carbamazepine modified release

telemetry
Simultaneous video and EEG recordings of a patient.

temporal lobe seizures
Seizures arising from the temporal lobe of the brain, otherwise known as complex partial seizures.

teratogenic effects
The effects that a drug may have on a developing foetus.

tiagabine
The generic name for the drug Gabitril®

tonic seizures
Seizures where the body goes stiff. They are similar to tonic-clonic seizures but there is no clonic (i.e. jerking) phase.

tonic-clonic seizures
Popularly known as grand mal seizures. The tonic phase is when the body goes stiff and is followed by the clonic phase, where the body convulses or jerks.

trauma
Injury due to accident.

triggers
Events which can provoke seizures, e.g. fatigue, menstrual cycle, poor compliance, flashing lights or alcohol.

Valium®
A trade name of the drug diazepam.

valproic acid
The generic name for the drug Convulex®

vigabatrin
The generic name of the antiepileptic drug Sabril®

visual seizures
Seizures accompanied by abnormal vision or by visual hallucinations.

Wada Test
A test administered by a clinical neuropsychologist to establish suitability for epilepsy surgery.

withdrawal seizures
Seizures which occur as medication is withdrawn, the person having been free of seizures whilst taking effective antiepileptic medication. These seizures usually only occur if the medication is withdrawn or stopped too quickly. Also seen after suddenly stopping some drugs of addiction, for instance alcohol or benzodiazepines.
Zarontin®
A trade name of the drug ethosuximide

Zonegran®
The trade name for the drug zonisamide

zonisamide
The generic name for the drug Zonegran®