

# Employer toolkit

Supporting employees with epilepsy in the workplace

## Focal seizures – With references

### Signs and symptoms

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A focal seizure can look like unusual behaviour. The symptoms people experience, and the behaviour you see, during a focal seizure varies. Some people might have one symptom during a focal seizure, while others can experience several.

During a focal seizure the person might be:

- Fully aware
- Partially aware of what is going on
- Totally unresponsive

An employee might tell you they have partial seizures. This is an old name for focal seizures.

### What happens

There are many different types of focal seizure, but they can split into 2 main types:<sup>1</sup>

1. **Focal aware** - During a focal aware seizure, the person stays aware of what's happening around them.
2. **Focal impaired awareness** - If somebody's awareness of what is happening around them is affected at any time during the seizure, it's called a focal impaired awareness seizure.

## Focal aware – signs and symptoms

Most focal aware seizures tend to be brief and will often only last a few seconds. Sometimes they are longer and can last for a couple of minutes. During a focal aware seizure, the person remains aware.

They can experience a range of symptoms, such as:

- Unusual body movements, such as stretching one arm while the other bends
- A rising feeling in the stomach – like the sensation of being on a rollercoaster
- Feeling like what's happening has happened before (déjà vu)
- Seeing flashing lights, colours or patterns
- Experiencing an unpleasant taste or smell
- Prickling, crawling or electric shock sensations, which may spread along the part of the body affected
- Seeing things as larger or smaller than they really are, or seeing things that aren't there
- Feeling like all or part their body is moving or floating
- A temporary loss of speech<sup>2</sup>

People sometimes call these seizures 'warnings' or 'auras' because they can be a sign that another type of seizure is about to happen. The symptoms may not be obvious to on lookers.

When someone is having a focal seizure it can be frightening and disorientating for them, so try not to 'crowd' them.

## Focal impaired awareness – signs and symptoms

Focal impaired awareness seizures tend to last longer, typically between 1 and 2 minutes. During a focal impaired awareness seizure, the person may have some awareness, but people can lose awareness completely and might be unresponsive during the seizure.

There are a range of symptoms, such as:

- Automatic behaviours such as fidgeting, undressing or plucking at clothes
- Lip smacking, repeated swallowing or chewing
- Kicking, pedalling, thrashing or rocking movements
- Screaming, swearing or laughing
- Their head or eyes turning to one side
- Changes to skin tone or heart rate

These seizures can look like random actions or movements to on lookers. If the persons behaviour is aggressive or they are lashing out it is advisable to remain quiet and keep a safe distance, whilst ensuring the person is safe.

## What happens afterwards

What happens after a focal seizure varies. Sometimes people feel fine after a focal seizure and can get back to what they were doing straight away. Other people can feel confused or tired afterwards and might want to sleep to help them recover.

Some people find they have temporary weakness or can't move part of their body afterwards. This is called Todd's paresis or Todd's paralysis. It can last from a few minutes to a few days, before going away.

## How to help

For how to help someone who is having a focal seizure, go to the first aid for seizures information.

[Focal seizure first aid](#)

## References

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.epilepsy.org.uk/info/seizures/focal-seizures> (Accessed online 29 October 2020)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.epilepsydiagnosis.org/seizure/cognitive-overview.html> (Accessed online 29 October 2020)

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## [\*\*employers.epilepsy.org.uk\*\*](https://employers.epilepsy.org.uk)

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