

# Employer toolkit

Supporting employees with epilepsy in the workplace

## Tonic-clonic seizures – With references

### Signs and symptoms

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A tonic-clonic seizure is what most people think of when they think of a seizure: losing consciousness, muscles stiffening, and seeing jerking movements. In the past they were called grand-mal seizures.

### What happens

There are 2 phases: the **tonic** phase, followed by the **clonic** phase.

During the tonic phase:

- Loss of consciousness - they won't be aware of what's happening
- Muscles going stiff and falling to the floor, if standing
- Crying out - this is the sound of air being squeezed out of the lungs, not because they are in pain
- They might bite their tongue or the inside of their mouth

Then, during the clonic phase:

- Quick and rhythmic jerking of their limbs
- They may lose control of their bladder and/or bowels
- A blue tinge around the mouth, if their breathing is affected
- They may dribble, and you might see blood in it if they have bitten their tongue

## How long does a tonic-clonic seizure last?

Most tonic-clonic seizures last between 1 and 3 minutes, but they can last longer for some people.



**A tonic-clonic seizure that lasts longer than 5 minutes is a medical emergency**

## What happens afterwards

The time it takes to recover varies. Some people feel better after an hour or two. Others can take a few days before they feel back to normal.

After a tonic-clonic seizure the person might have a headache, feel sore, tired and unwell. Sometimes people are confused, have unusual behaviour or their memory might be affected. Some people need to sleep to help them recover.

Sometimes people experience a temporary weakness or can't move part of their body after a seizure. 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 tonic-clonic seizure go to first aid for seizures.

[Tonic-clonic seizure first aid](#)

## References

There are no references for this information.

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

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