

# Epilepsy A Hot Topic

**T**here could be good news for the almost 3 million Americans currently diagnosed with epilepsy and the millions more who may be some day. Epilepsy is fast becoming a hot topic in the news and more people are speaking out about it.

Epilepsy is a neurological condition that can affect anyone, anywhere, at any time. Approximately one in 30 people will develop epilepsy at some time in their lives, according to the Epilepsy Foundation ([www.epilepsyfoundation.org](http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org)).

Despite its prevalence, many people do not understand epilepsy. Myths and misperceptions about the condition have caused discrimination in the workplace, at school and hindered the early diagnosis and timely treatment of people with the disorder. But the tide is turning.

Many celebrities are now speaking about epilepsy. Rock star, Prince, recently revealed that he experienced seizures as a child and was picked on frequently. He said as a result he decided to be as flashy and loud as he could be. Greg Grunberg, star of the hit primetime TV series, *Heroes*, whose oldest son has epilepsy, is speaking out and engaging friends in Hollywood to support the Epilepsy Foundation and its mission. New York Jets offensive lineman and seven-time Pro Bowl player, Alan Faneca, and Atlanta Falcons running back Jason Snelling, both diagnosed with epilepsy as teenagers, are also sharing their stories to help make a difference.

Epilepsy is characterized by seizures—a change in sensation, awareness or behavior brought on by a brief electrical disturbance in the brain. Seizures vary from a momentary disruption of the senses, to short periods of unconsciousness or staring spells, to convulsions. These physical changes are called epileptic seizures. That is why epilepsy is sometimes called a seizure disorder. Having a single seizure does not necessarily mean a person has epilepsy. High fever, severe head injury, lack of oxygen—a number of factors can affect the brain enough to cause a single seizure. Epilepsy, on the other hand, is an underlying condition (or permanent brain injury) that affects the delicate systems which govern how electrical

energy behaves in the brain, making it susceptible to recurring seizures.

In a study of racial and ethnic disparities in epilepsy treatment, a team from the University of Cincinnati found that African-American patients frequently had limited access to both epilepsy specialists and anti-epileptic drugs. Other studies have found that head trauma, substance abuse and noncompliance with treatment plans all contributed to poor outcomes for an inner-city African-American population with epilepsy.

For many African-Americans with epilepsy, access to appropriate care is a central problem. But even more damaging than issues of medical care can be the fear, misperceptions and discrimination imposed by people who don't know the truth about epilepsy—that it doesn't define a person, it's just a medical condition.

With programs and services ranging from summer camps to legal services and employment support, the Epilepsy Foundation is working to ensure that people with seizures are able to participate in all life experiences. Resources are available to educate first responders, caregivers, school nurses, seniors, youth and parents about the condition.

Education about epilepsy is key to changing attitudes and encouraging those with the condition to seek proper care.

### Myths and Facts About Epilepsy

**Myth:** A person having a seizure can swallow his tongue.

**Fact:** Efforts to hold the tongue down or putting something in the mouth can hurt the tooth or jaw.

**Myth:** People with epilepsy are dangerous or possessed by the devil.

**Fact:** Epilepsy is a neurologic disorder, and it is rare that someone having a seizure will harm another person.

**Myth:** You should hold a person down while he's having a seizure.

**Fact:** You should make sure the area near the person is safe and that there is nothing hard or sharp near him.

**Myth:** You should perform artificial respiration.

**Fact:** Artificial respiration is needed only if the person does not start breathing after the seizure has stopped.



**Epilepsy is more common than you think.**



## know the difference?



Epilepsy affects almost 3 million Americans of all ages.

To learn more about epilepsy, call 800-332-1000 or visit [www.epilepsyfoundation.org/knowthedifference](http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org/knowthedifference)



To learn more about our programs and outreach activities call 800-332-1000 or visit [www.epilepsyfoundation.org/knowthedifference](http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org/knowthedifference)

