

Table 5. Clinical Manifestations of Seizures

Absence Seizures (“petit mal”) (A generalized-onset seizure)

- no aura or warning
- motionless with blank stare
- eyelid fluttering or other automatisms in longer seizures
- short duration (usually less than 10 seconds)
- little or no postictal confusion
- often precipitated by hyperventilation
- EEG photosensitivity in 18% of childhood absence epilepsy
- EEG: generalized 3 Hz spike-wave

Typical Temporal Lobe Complex Partial Seizure (a partial-onset seizure)

- Aura of autonomic, psychic, epigastric, or olfactory sensation sometimes occurs
- Arrest of movement is common
- Oroalimentary, gestural, mimetic, ambulatory, or verbal automatisms
- Usually 60-90 seconds
- Postictal language disturbance when seizures originate in dominant hemisphere
- Often confusion with gradual recovery
- Amnesia for event

Typical Simple Partial Seizure

- No impairment of consciousness
- Lasts 60-90 seconds
- No amnesia for event
- Symptoms depend on area of the brain involved
- **temporal:** autonomic, psychic, epigastric, or olfactory sensation
- **frontal:** focal motor twitching
- **parietal:** focal sensory symptoms
- **occipital:** visual hallucinations (usually unformed)

Typical Tonic-Clonic Seizure (may be generalized or partial onset)

- Loss of consciousness
- Widespread tonic muscle contraction, upward eye deviation, “epileptic cry” with forced expiration of air, tongue biting, incontinence
- Followed by clonic phase with rhythmic jerking of all extremities
- Duration 1-2 minutes
- Postictal confusion with gradual return to consciousness longer than 5 minutes—1 hour
- Amnesia for seizure as well as most of postictal period

Typical Myoclonic Seizure (a generalized-onset seizure)

- Sudden, involuntary, brief shock-like muscle contraction arising from the CNS
- May involve any and all limbs and/or face/mouth, symmetrically or asymmetrically
- Single or repetitive
- Duration: fleeting (each one < 1 second)
- No clear loss of consciousness, amnesia, or postictal confusion
- EEG: generalized spike-wave with each jerk
- May appear clinically similar to spinal cord myoclonus or to hypnic jerks of sleep

Typical “Drop” Seizures (generalized-onset tonic or atonic seizure)

- **Tonic:** tonic widespread contraction of muscles lasting 10-15 seconds→ drop
- **Atonic:** loss of muscle tone lasting 1-2 sec → drop of head, trunk, or whole body
- Brief loss of consciousness
- No or minimal postictal confusion
- Often lead to repeated injury due to falls; patients may require helmets