Ask the Doctor



Understanding epilepsy

BY BEATRICE NAKIBUUKA

Epilepsy is a condition that affects the brain. A person with epilepsy has repeated seizures.

According to Dr Robert Sebunya, a consultant neurologist at Nsambya Hospital, a seizure happens when there is a sudden burst of unusual activity in the brain. This can make someone shake, fall down, stare into space, or lose awareness for a short time. Seizures can look different from person to person.

Even though epilepsy has been known for many years, many people still believe some myths about it. In some communities, people think epilepsy is caused by witchcraft or spirits. Others believe it is contagious. These ideas are wrong. You cannot catch epilepsy from touching someone.

"Because of these myths, some children and adults with epilepsy are treated unfairly. They may be teased at school, left out of games, or even kept away from class. Some adults may struggle to find jobs. This unfair treatment is called stigma. Sometimes the stigma hurts more than the seizures themselves," Dr Sebunya says.

In Uganda, many children are affected by epilepsy. Doctors say children are more likely than adults to have the condition. Sadly, many families delay going to the hospital when seizures begin.

Some hope the seizures will stop on their own. Others first visit traditional healers. Because of this delay, children may wait months or even years before getting proper treatment.

Around the world, epilepsy affects about 65 million people, according to the World Health Organisation.

Doctors explain that having one seizure does not always mean a person has epilepsy. A diagnosis is made when someone has repeated seizures that are not caused by fever or another temporary illness. Sometimes epilepsy may be linked to head injuries, infections of the brain, problems at birth, strokes, or even tiny parasites from undercooked pork.

"Fortunately, epilepsy can often be treated. People with this condition can control their seizures by taking medicine every day. Some children even outgrow certain types of epilepsy as they get older," he says.

Helping out

If someone has a seizure, it is important to stay calm. Gently turn them onto their side, move sharp objects away, and call for medical help if the seizure lasts more than five minutes. Never put anything in their mouth.

Most importantly, children with epilepsy need kindness and understanding. They can learn, play, and dream just like everyone else. By learning the truth about epilepsy, we can replace fear with friendship and help end the stigma once and for all.

Send your health questions to:
rainbow@ug.nationmedia.com

CamScanner