

Psychogenic Non-Epileptic Seizures (PNES)

What are Psychogenic Non-Epileptic Seizures?

Psychogenic Non-Epileptic Seizures (PNES) appear to look like epileptic seizures, but they are not caused by electrical disturbances in the brain. It is possible for one person to have both epileptic and psychogenic non-epileptic seizures.

What causes PNES?

PNES is often the result of traumatic psychological experiences. Sometimes the experiences themselves are forgotten, but their impact remains. PNES is a real condition that is a response to a very real stress. People with PNES are not faking their seizures.

How is PNES diagnosed?

EEG video monitoring is the most reliable way to diagnose PNES since these seizures are not associated with a spike and wave pattern on the EEG.

How is PNES treated?

PNES is not treatable with Anti-Seizure Medications. However, it is effectively treated by specialists trained in psychological issues, including psychiatrists, psychologists, and clinical social workers. Some treatments include:

- Psychotherapy
- Stress-reduction techniques (relaxation, bio-feedback)
- Personal support

With proper treatment, 60-70% of adults with PNES will eventually stop having seizures. The success rate is even higher in children and adolescents. Early diagnosis is an important factor in successful treatment.

If you or your loved one has been diagnosed with PNES – call your local Epilepsy Community Agency for guidance on support programs in your community.

Adapted from "Psychogenic (Non-Epileptic) Seizures: A Guide for Parents & Families (Tampa General Hospital; University of South Florida College of Medicine).