

NONEPILEPTIC SPELLS (NES) or PSEUDOSEIZURES

What are nonepileptic spells?

Nonepileptic spells (NES) are also called pseudoseizures or nervous spells. NES are behavioral spells that look like epileptic seizures to an observer but are due to stressful psychological events, emotional trauma, or developmental and family conflicts.

What is the difference between epileptic seizures and NES?

Epileptic seizures are due to an electrical storm in the brain that can be easily detected on EEG brain wave recording during a seizure. NES are not due to abnormal EEG brain waves; brain waves are normal during NES.

What causes NES?

Depression, anxiety, stress, family conflict, a history of abuse, and psychological or psychiatric problems that do not alter EEG brain waves are common. There is sometimes an obvious cause, but often it is difficult to find the underlying problem.

What if we can't find an underlying cause?

Counseling from a certified counselor, psychologist or psychiatrist is helpful even if a specific cause cannot be found, because they can teach you techniques for dealing with the spells. Some techniques include relaxation training, visualization, biofeedback, and active problem solving skills.

Am I faking it?

No. NES are not “faked.” You are not making it up. You have no control over yourself during NES. However, the important difference between NES and epileptic seizures is that NES can be brought back under your control with treatment.

Am I bringing it on my self?

No. However, you can learn to reduce the spells or prevent them from happening with the proper therapy.

Can my brain be damaged from NES?

No. The brain has normal electrical activity during a NES so it is not injured.

Can NES affect my activities of daily living?

When a spell occurs, you should stop what you are doing until the spell passes. You should resume your regular activities as soon as you can after a spell.

Can I also have NES if I already have epilepsy?

Yes. It is possible for people with epilepsy to also have NES, although it is uncommon. EEG monitoring can determine which spells are seizures and which are NES.

How is the diagnosis of NES made?

Combined EEG brain wave and video monitoring during a spell can distinguish NES from seizures because the EEG shows an “electrical storm” during an epileptic seizure.

What are the treatment options for NES?

Treatment begins with further evaluation by a specialist in these conditions, including psychologists, licensed counselors, and psychiatrists. Treatments include counseling and medications.

What is the long-term outcome?

NES often stop spontaneously without other intervention after the diagnosis is made. However, the underlying problem will persist and, therefore, further evaluation and treatment can be very helpful in improving your health and quality of life.

Where can I find a psychologist?

Ask your primary care physician or use the American Psychological Association web site to find a psychologist at: <http://locator.apahelpcenter.org/>