

Non Epileptic Attack Disorder

What is it – a neurological event where the nervous system goes from being in balance with itself, to being in a state of chaos, moving back to stability over a period of time. Imagine a colony of ants marching in a coordinated line. Then, draw your finger across that line. Breaking the chemical trail the ants follow. Watch the ants go into a state of disarray. This appears chaotic as they try to re-establish the line. In a short time, they do. The line is reformed. Order is back.

Try it - but try not to squish the ants. They have a hard enough time. Just following that line is difficult.

What happens to the person – for me, I have two types of seizures. Physical and non-physical. I know when a physical seizure is about to happen. I get a pre-warning of around ten seconds called an aura. This allows me to either put myself into a safe position and/or distract the event from happening. If I cannot distract myself, I need to lie down and be made safe. I will find a space where I can lie down and adopt the recovery position on my side. The seizure can be quite violent, so I need to have my head protected. A pillow under my head against a hard floor. I also need to have a blanket pulled over me to contain my arms and legs. I may inadvertently punch you on the nose. I must not be held down. The seizure will last for a few minutes and will pass. I am not in pain. I can breathe easily but may breathe heavily due to exertion. I do not become incontinent. I know when it is over. I can say the word hippopotamus and I have a very bad headache.

What I ask you to do – stay calm and stay with me. If there is someone with you, ask them to contact Miranda who will be in the building. It may be distressing for you to watch. I am not in any pain. I will lie on the blanket in the recovery position. Keep my head safe by putting the pillow under my head. Pull the blanket over me and hold the sides. This is to contain my arms and legs. Do not forcibly hold me down. Keep the blanket in place until I say it is over. I may have multiple seizures in one sequence. When I start to be more still ask me how I am. Ask me to say where I am. Ask me to say hippopotamus. My speech may be impaired but will return. I will say when it is over. If you would like a demonstration of how to make me safe just ask. I will not be embarrassed.

What happens afterwards – I may be slow in my thoughts. I may use some ‘tasty’ language to describe how I am feeling. Please do not be offended. I may take a short while to ‘get with it’. Within a few minutes, I will be able to talk to you. I am lucid and back. My head hurts. The nervous system returns to normal quite quickly. Life carries on as usual.

How do I distract myself – I put my headphones on. I listen to music. I focus on being the conductor. You will see me conducting the orchestra. I may ignore you. Not because I am being rude. I am really concentrating on distracting myself. I may use sensory grounding techniques. I will gently rock on my feet. I may walk up and down. I may press my hands together.

What about the non physical seizures – these are harder for me to manage. I do get a short onset warning but not an aura. I will zone out. I lose concentration. I become confused. I will not finish a sentence. I may lose my speech. I appear vacant. These happen when I am engaged with people. You will notice a marked difference in how I appear to you. I am not in pain. I will not drop to the floor. I will just sit down in a chair. These last a few minutes sometimes longer. It takes me ten minutes to fully recover afterwards. Just keep an eye on me and ask me how I am doing. I will let you know when it has passed.

What can you say to me – anything you would say normally. I am very open about my condition. I am not embarrassed by it. I understand you may have questions. Please ask me anything. It is not a fully understood condition. In every 100,000 people not many will have this condition. I don't expect people to have come across it very often before.