

Key terms to know

Autism is a developmental disability that affects how a person experiences the world around them. Autism looks different for every person. Two core characteristics of autism include differences with social communication and a demonstration of restrictive repetitive patterns of behaviors or interests (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

A **seizure** is a sudden, quick, burst of electrical activity in the brain that changes or disrupts the way messages are sent between brain cells. It can cause changes in a person's behavior, movements, awareness, or sensations. Seizures can vary in type and severity but often come and go on their own (Kiriakopoulos, 2019).

Epilepsy is a medical condition when a person's brain tends to have seizures. A doctor typically diagnoses epilepsy based on a combination of clinical evaluation, medical history, and diagnostic tests. Epilepsy is thought to occur from a combination of genetic and environmental factors (Besag, 2017; Mayo Clinic, n.d.).

What is the connection between autism & epilepsy?

There are common genetic factors associated with both autism and epilepsy (Lee et al, 2015). Autistic people are more likely to experience a seizure compared to non-autistic people. About twenty to thirty percent of autistic children are diagnosed with epilepsy by the time they reach adulthood (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, n.d); however, autism does not cause epilepsy. Autism is also not associated with a specific type of seizure.

What should I do if someone is having a seizure?

For most seizures, it is recommended to follow basic seizure first aid steps: **Stay. Safe. Side.**

Stay: Stay with the person and start timing the seizure

Safe: Keep the person safe

Side: Turn the person onto their side if they are not awake or aware

Seizure First Aid

How to help someone having a seizure

1

STAY with the person until they are awake and alert after the seizure.

- ✓ Time the seizure
- ✓ Remain calm
- ✓ Check for medical ID



2

Keep the person **SAFE**.

- ✓ Move or guide away from harm



3

Turn the person onto their **SIDE** if they are not awake and aware.

- ✓ Keep airway clear
- ✓ Loosen tight clothes around neck
- ✓ Put something small and soft under the head



Call
911
if...

- ▶ Seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes
- ▶ Person does not return to their usual state
- ▶ Person is injured, pregnant, or sick
- ▶ Repeated seizures
- ▶ First time seizure
- ▶ Difficulty breathing
- ▶ Seizure occurs in water

Do
NOT

- ✗ Do **NOT** restrain.
- ✗ Do **NOT** put any objects in their mouth.
- ✓ Rescue medicines can be given if prescribed by a health care professional

Learn more: epilepsy.com/firstaid



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epilepsy.com

24/7 Helpline : 1-800-332-1000

Stay. Safe. Side. retrieved from: <https://www.epilepsy.com/recognition/>

Additional resource guides and a full list of references at <https://www.delawareautismnetwork.org/>.

Steinbrecher, A., Fletcher, A., Budischak, V., Mallory, S., & DNEA CDS Team. (2023). *DNEA resource guide: Autism & epilepsy*. Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism.



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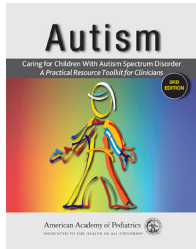
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Autism & Epilepsy

DNEA Resource Guide

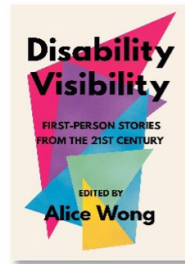
Resources

Books



[Autism – Caring for Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Practical Resource Toolkit for Clinicians \(3rd Edition\)](#) – Toolkit Chapter: Seizures and Epilepsy
- Published by the American Academy of Pediatrics

[Disability Visibility](#) - Edited by Alice Wong



Online

Autistic Self Advocacy Network at autisticadvocacy.org

Epilepsy Foundation at epilepsy.com

Epilepsy Foundation of Delaware at efde.org

Additional Materials

Epilepsy Foundation Tools & Resources at epilepsy.com/tools-resources

- [New to Seizures and Epilepsy Toolkit](#)
- [Seizure Action Plan](#)

References

American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. (5th edition, text revision). American Psychiatric Association.

Besag, F. M. (2017). Epilepsy in patients with autism: Links, risks and treatment challenges. *Neuropsychiatric disease and treatment*, 14, 1-10.

Kiriakopoulos, E. (2019, October 1). *Understanding seizures*. Epilepsy Foundation. <https://www.epilepsy.com/what-is-epilepsy/understanding-seizures>

Lee, B. H., Smith, T., & Paciorkowski, A. R. (2015). Autism spectrum disorder and epilepsy: Disorders with a shared biology. *Epilepsy & Behavior*, 47, 191-201.

Mayo Clinic. (n.d.). *Epilepsy*. Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/epilepsy/symptoms-causes/syc-20350093>

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. (n.d.). *Autism Spectrum Disorder*. [National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. https://www.ninds.nih.gov/health-information/disorders/autism-spectrum-disorder](https://www.ninds.nih.gov/health-information/disorders/autism-spectrum-disorder)

Interested in becoming Seizure First Aid Certified?

Check out the [DNEA training and events calendar](#) to register for an upcoming *Autism & Epilepsy: Seizure Recognition and First Aid Certification* training, presented in partnership with the Epilepsy Foundation of Delaware.

This training reviews the core characteristics of autism and the co-occurrence of autism and epilepsy. Participants who successfully complete the post-knowledge assessment in the Epilepsy Foundation Learning Portal will receive a two-year certification in Seizure Recognition and First Aid.



<https://www.delawareautismnetwork.org/>
Scan the QR code to visit the DNEA training & events calendar

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