Seizures and Brain Metastases

For people with brain metastases

This brochure has information about:

- How brain metastases and seizures are related
- Signs of a seizure
- What to do if you have a seizure
- What to do if you have questions

What are brain metastases?

A brain metastasis is a tumour that has spread to the brain from another place in the body. For example, if someone has lung cancer, cancer cells that spread to the brain from the lung(s) are called brain metastases. Metastases are different from cancers that start in the brain (called a “primary brain cancer”).

Each part of the brain controls a specific function, action or feeling. Brain metastases can affect any part of the brain. The number, size and location of your brain metastases can change what you feel.

Sometimes patients find out they have cancer in other parts of their body when they have brain metastases.
What is a seizure?
A seizure happens when there is a burst of abnormal electrical activity in the brain.

The signs of a seizure depend on the type of seizure and where it is in the brain.

Some seizures cause the body to go stiff with jerking motions in the arms and legs. This is a specific type of seizure called a **generalized tonic-clonic seizure**.

Other seizures cause a person to seem like they are staring into space and they do stop respond when called. These are called **absence seizures**.

How are brain metastases and seizures related?
Brain metastases can cause seizures. Tumour cells in the brain can grow abnormally and affect how brain cells communicate.

Seizures can also be caused by other disorders, and can happen in people without cancer. If you have a seizure after being treated for brain metastases, it does not mean that your brain metastases have grown back or that you have new brain metastases. Seizures can happen long after brain metastases were treated.

How can I tell if I have a seizure?
Seizures can happen in many different ways. Here are some common signs that you or those around you can watch for:

- jerking movements of the body, arms and legs
- eyes staring blankly or rolling back
- losing control of urine or bowel function
- biting the tongue or smacking the lips
- being unresponsive or losing consciousness
A seizure may also be happening if there are:

- unusual changes in the senses. For example:
  - numbness or tingling
  - smelling or tasting something all of a sudden
  - seeing or hearing things other people do not
- strong emotions that start and end quickly and suddenly

**How can I prevent myself from having seizures?**

- Let your doctor know if you think you are having seizures, so you can receive the right treatments.
- Take your anti-seizure medicine if your doctor has prescribed this for you.
- Avoid stressing your body and mind (for example, get enough sleep and drink water to stay hydrated).

**How are seizures treated?**

Your doctor may give you anti-seizure medicines. It is important that you take these medicines as prescribed. Do NOT stop unless your doctor tells you to.

Certain over-the-counter medicines and herbal supplements can interact with seizure medicines or increase the chances of having a seizure.

Please let your health care team know if you are taking any herbal supplements, vitamins or non-prescription medicines.
What can those around me do if I have a seizure?
You can let those around you know the following:

• Stay calm and stay with you.
• Don’t move you unless you are in danger (for example, near stairs or a fire).
• Loosen any clothing that might be wrapped around the neck or chest.
• Don’t try to open your mouth even if you are biting your tongue.
• If possible, gently try and roll your body or head to the side.
• Place padding such as rolled up clothes or pillows around you.
• Try to take note of how long the seizure lasts, what movements you make, and which body parts move.
• When the seizure is over, let you rest and contact their health care team.

• Call 911 or go to the nearest hospital emergency if:
  ▪ you lose consciousness
  ▪ the seizure does not stop on its own after a few minutes
  ▪ you get injured during a seizure

What should I do if I have more questions?
Contact your health care team if you have questions about your condition. Your doctor or nurse can guide you to the right health care professionals to answer your questions.

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