A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Epilepsy Awareness

National Epilepsy Awareness Month – November, 2013
Recorded: November 5, 2013; posted: November 7, 2013

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Approximately 150,000 people in the U.S. develop epilepsy each year, and more than two million have been diagnosed with it.

Rosemarie Kobau is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. She's joining us today to discuss ways to control and prevent epilepsy. Welcome to the show, Rosemarie.

[Ms. Kobau] Thank you, Bob. It's a pleasure to be here.

[Dr. Gaynes] Rosemarie, let's start with what is epilepsy and what causes it?

[Ms. Kobau] Epilepsy, which is sometimes referred to as a seizure disorder, is a brain disorder that causes recurrent seizures. And epilepsy is usually diagnosed after a person has had at least two seizures. Epilepsy is caused by different conditions that affect a person's brain. So, for example, poor prenatal care that can affect brain development in the baby, brain infections, traumatic brain injuries or other head injuries, and strokes are common causes of epilepsy. And it's important for people to know that in nearly two-thirds of the cases of epilepsy, a specific cause is not identified.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are the most common symptoms of epilepsy?

[Ms. Kobau] The primary symptoms of epilepsy are seizures and seizures may produce momentary changes in awareness, involuntary movements, convulsions, or other changes in behavior. And usually a seizure lasts from a few seconds to a few minutes. And it's important for people to understand that doctors have described more than 30 different types of seizures.

[Dr. Gaynes] What treatment is available for people with epilepsy?

[Ms. Kobau] Proper diagnosis of epilepsy in a person is crucial for finding an effective treatment. And there are many different ways to treat epilepsy. The most common approach to treating epilepsy is to prescribe seizure medicines. If medicines don't work, people with epilepsy can also consider surgery, and there are medical devices—something called a vagus nerve stimulator, and for some people with epilepsy, especially children, a special diet can help control or reduce seizures.

[Dr. Gaynes] Are there other, unexpected, medical concerns for people who have epilepsy?

[Ms. Kobau] Yes. So, people with epilepsy often have other conditions, such as heart disease and stroke, and asthma that can interfere with their epilepsy management. And it's important for people with epilepsy to not neglect these other conditions.

[Dr. Gaynes] Rosemarie, can epilepsy be prevented?

[Ms. Kobau] Sometimes epilepsy can be prevented. So, brain injuries, which are often due to motor vehicle crashes or falls, are a frequent cause of epilepsy. And safety measures, such as wearing seat belts in cars, wearing helmets when riding a bike or a motorcycle or playing other competitive sports can prevent head injuries which, in turn, can prevent epilepsy.

Good prenatal care, including treatment of high blood pressure and infections during pregnancy can prevent brain damage in the developing baby that may lead to epilepsy. And stroke, a common cause of epilepsy, can be prevented by reducing or treating risk factors, such as physical inactivity, high blood pressure, obesity, and smoking.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about epilepsy?

[Ms. Kobau] Listeners can go to cdc.gov/epilepsy.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Rosemarie. I've been talking today with CDC's Rosemarie Kobau about ways to control and possibly prevent epilepsy.

Remember: To decrease your risk of developing epilepsy, take steps to prevent strokes and head injuries and get prenatal care. Early diagnosis and treatment can help a person with epilepsy live a full and healthy life.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC.*

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.