

Several conditions can result in loss of consciousness, yet not be associated with the abnormal electrical discharge in the brain characteristic of a seizure.

When a person suddenly loses consciousness, it can be a tense moment. If an observer reports that a person is stiffening, shaking or jerking during a period of unconsciousness, or of an experienced medical history taker notes symptoms of epilepsy, then the event can be categorized as a seizure. Often, however, this period of unconsciousness goes unobserved or the symptoms during the event are unclear. It is important to understand that there are other conditions that can cause loss of consciousness.

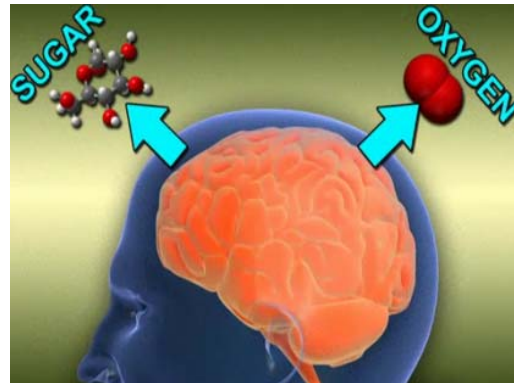


The most common medical cause of loss of consciousness is fainting, for which the medical term is syncope. Fainting happens when the brain does not get enough blood flow. You can blame the fight-or-flight response for this occurrence. When the brain experiences a sudden stress, the blood rushes to the muscles in anticipation of fleeing or counterattacking a danger. The contraction of the muscles during the fight-or-flight that follows returns blood to the heart and brain. But in modern society, we may not react to certain kinds of perceived danger or pain, like the drawing of blood for laboratory tests. In cases like this, blood pools in the muscles and the lack of muscle contraction may prevent the heart from having enough blood to pump to the brain. This can cause the brain to temporarily shut down, resulting in vasovagal syncope, the medical term for a common faint.

Fainting can also happen when people have lost blood, are dehydrated or have certain cardiac problems. Fainting from heart problems can be serious and requires immediate medical investigation.

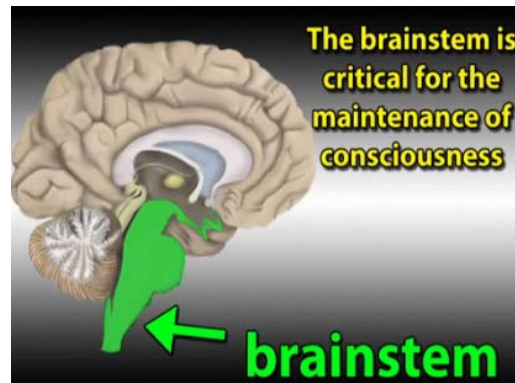
Usually when people faint, they lie limp. However, some faints provoke a true seizure, which is one way the brain may react to reduced blood supply. A seizure with fainting, which is called convulsive syncope, does not imply epilepsy, but it does require that medical professionals look into what is causing the fainting.

# CONSCIOUSNESS IMITATORS OF SEIZURES



In other cases, loss of consciousness can stem from a loss of one of the brain's two vital fuels: sugar and oxygen. Excessively low sugar is called hypoglycemia and can cause loss of consciousness. Low sugar can result from prolonged fasting, excess insulin hormone, medication side effects or a reaction to a high carbohydrate meal. People with hypoglycemia usually feel a build-up of hunger, lightheadedness and general ill feeling before losing consciousness. While hypoglycemia can cause symptoms like loss of consciousness that imitate seizures, it also can provoke real epileptic seizures.

Low oxygen, which can result from lung disease, choking or high altitude, either can cause symptoms that imitate a seizure or provoke a real one.



Another reason for loss of consciousness is a condition called transient ischemic attack or TIA. In a TIA, blood flow to piece of the brain is interrupted briefly, causing brain tissue to temporarily stop working. Some parts of the brain, such as the brain stem, are critical for the maintenance of consciousness. When a TIA affects this area, consciousness may suddenly be lost.

Because loss of consciousness can be caused by several different conditions, many people who are having seizures mistakenly think they are experiencing something else. On the other side of the coin, are people who think they have seizures, but actually have one of the imitators.

In the end, if seizures do not respond to the usual treatments, then the diagnosis should be reconsidered.