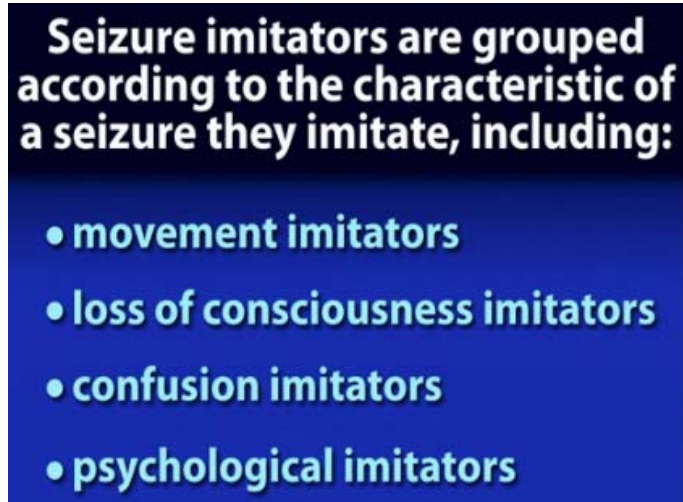


Seizures can be scary, but they are often manageable once diagnosed. But what if what you're experiencing isn't really a seizure?



Some medical conditions can cause symptoms that mimic certain aspects of seizures, which can make diagnosis difficult. These imitators can be grouped according to the characteristic of a seizure that they impersonate. They include movement imitators, loss of consciousness imitators, confusion imitators and psychological imitators. Each of these imitators may cause a symptom that looks like a seizure in some way, but they do not show the EEG changes in the brain that are characteristic of an epileptic seizure.

Movement imitators of seizures often manifest as unusual postures or movements, including twitching or twisting. A well-known example of a movement imitator is a tic, which is a habitual quick movement that may be somewhat voluntary.

Loss of consciousness imitators are conditions that may cause the patient to lose consciousness, which can be mistaken for a seizure. The most common reason for loss of consciousness, unrelated to seizures, is a faint. Fainting happens when the brain does not get enough blood flow for one of several possible reasons.

Another category of seizure imitators are conditions that result in sudden confusion. This confusion may look like the uncertainty sometimes experienced by a person having a seizure.

A transient ischemic attack or mini-stroke occurs when blood flow to the brain is briefly interrupted. If a transient ischemic attack affects the speech or memory centers in the brain, sudden bewilderment may result.

Finally, psychological imitators are the group of imitators that are often the most difficult for doctors to distinguish from epileptic seizures. Psychological imitators include some common conditions, like hyperventilating. When a person hyperventilates, he or she is essentially breathing very fast. Hyperventilation often accompanies a panic attack, which is another common psychological imitator of seizures. But perhaps the most perplexing of all the psychological imitators are psychogenic nonepileptic seizures or PNES. A PNES is a seizure-like event, but it does not arise from abnormal discharges in the brain. Instead, a PNES is brought on by psychological factors.

Most of the time, people who experience a PNES are not aware of the psychological conditions that cause them. In the end, so many conditions can imitate seizures that it is important to get a doctor's professional opinion. For a more in-depth look at seizure imitators, please check out the other videos in this series.