

Certain psychological conditions can cause psychogenic nonepileptic seizures, which are episodes that imitate seizures.

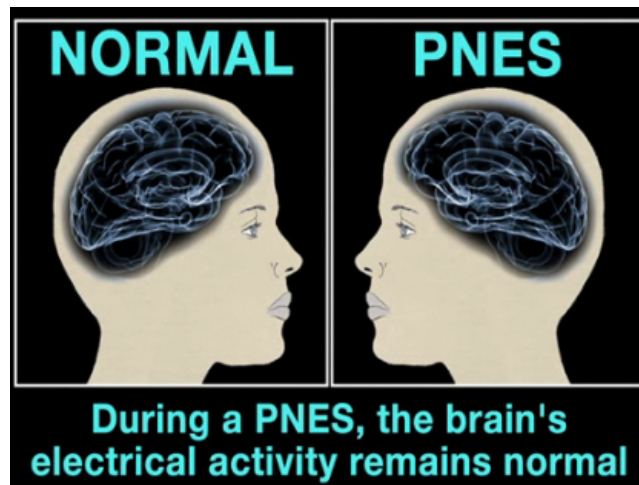
A PNES is a seizure-like event that is produced, not by abnormal electrical charges in the brain, but by psychological factors of which the patient is not fully aware and cannot control. Psychogenic nonepileptic seizures go by many names, including pseudoseizures, psychological seizures, psychosomatic seizures, psychogenic seizures. Because thoughts and feelings have impact upon our physical being, unresolved stressors often manifest as physical symptoms, be they headaches, ulcers, skin rashes or shaking and blackouts that look like seizures. Sometimes the stressors that lead to a PNES involve extreme pressure to succeed in an area of one's life. Other times, stressors are consequences of mental, physical or sexual abuse. These traumas can remain from years past, even dating back to childhood. The unconscious brain does not treat time in the same way that the conscious brain does, and old psychological issues can live on. They are even more potent if something happens today to bring back the feelings of yesterday. Therefore, a psychogenic nonepileptic seizure may result from result from unresolved stress and psychological tension dating back years.



It's important to note that people with epileptic seizures list stress as one of the most common provoking factors. This means that having an event that is provoked by stress does not necessarily mean that the person is having a PNES.

Family and friends of people with psychogenic nonepileptic seizures should realize that the person having the problem is not "faking," it on intentionally, but that it is an involuntary medical condition. People with PNES are a very mixed group. Some have mental disorders such as depression, adjustment disorders, personality disorders or rarely even psychotic disorders. Then again, other people with PNES have no obvious underlying mental problems whatsoever. That's why everybody needs to be evaluated and treated individually.

During the psychogenic nonepileptic event, the brain's electrical activity, which is shown by its EEG pattern, remains normal. This point can be confusing even to doctors, because an EEG occasionally can be normal during epileptic seizures as well. Also, remember that the EEG is often normal between seizures in people who do have epilepsy.



On occasion, a person can have both nonepileptic and epileptic seizures, making diagnosis even more difficult. To those who have them or see them in a loved one, nonepileptic seizures are as real as are epileptic seizures. Any seizure-like event requires appropriate diagnosis and medical care.