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MADISON NEUROLOGY LLC

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Neurology Care 7 days a Week. Because Your Brain Matters.

Temporal Lobe Epilepsy

Patient education guide · Epilepsy & Seizures · Madison Neurology LLC

What is it?

Temporal lobe epilepsy is the most common focal epilepsy in adults, usually arising from the brain's memory structures (the hippocampus). Seizures often begin with a warning 'aura' — a rising feeling in the stomach, déjà vu, or a strange smell — followed by staring, unresponsiveness, and automatic behaviors like lip smacking.

How does it happen?

The most common cause is hippocampal sclerosis — scarring of the hippocampus sometimes linked to prolonged febrile seizures, infections, or injury earlier in life. Other causes include small developmental abnormalities, cavernomas, or scars from past trauma.

Common symptoms

- Auras: déjà vu, rising stomach sensation, fear, odd smells or tastes
- Staring episodes with impaired awareness lasting 1-2 minutes
- Automatic behaviors: lip smacking, chewing motions, picking at clothes
- Post-event confusion and fatigue
- Memory difficulties, which may gradually worsen if seizures are uncontrolled

How is it diagnosed?

Epilepsy-protocol MRI looks for hippocampal sclerosis or other lesions, and EEG captures temporal discharges. Video-EEG monitoring characterizes typical events; specialized testing maps language and memory when surgery is considered.

How is it treated?

Medication is tried first. Temporal lobe epilepsy is, however, the most medication-resistant focal epilepsy — and the most surgically treatable. For patients whose seizures persist after two medications, removal or laser ablation of the seizure focus offers 60-80% seizure-freedom rates at experienced centers, usually with minimal effect on overall memory when the opposite side is healthy.

What does the future hold?

With medication alone, complete control is achieved in a minority of medication-resistant cases, but surgery offers the best chance of seizure freedom of any epilepsy treatment — transforming driving, work, and independence. Early referral to an epilepsy center is recommended when medications fail, since years of uncontrolled seizures are harder on memory and mood.

Questions patients commonly ask

Q: What is an aura?

A: An aura is actually a small seizure — a warning generated in the temporal lobe before (or instead of) a larger event. Noticing it can provide a moment to get safe.

Q: Will surgery affect my memory?

A: Detailed pre-surgical testing measures memory on both sides; for appropriately selected patients, significant memory decline is uncommon, and uncontrolled seizures themselves damage memory over time.

Q: I've failed two medications — what now?

A: That meets the definition of drug-resistant epilepsy; guidelines recommend evaluation at a specialized epilepsy center rather than cycling through more of the same.

National support groups & resources

- **Epilepsy Foundation (24/7 Helpline)** — epilepsy.com — 1-800-332-1000
- **American Epilepsy Society** — aesnet.org
- **American Academy of Neurology — Brain & Life patient resources** — brainandlife.org

(Organization contact details were current at the time of compilation; please verify online.)

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