

Case 13: TEMPORAL LOBE EPILEPSY (Slide CC13-1)

Chief Complaint: The Patient is a 34 year old woman who has had intractable complex partial seizures ("temporal lobe epilepsy") since age 4 years.

History of Present Illness/Past Medical History: At the age of three years the patient was hospitalized for several weeks with high fevers due to presumed meningo/encephalitis. She recovered fully, but at age four years she began to have seizures which have continued until the present time despite attempts at treatment with multiple anti-seizure medications. Her seizures typically begin with a sensation of "butterflies in my stomach" (abdominal aura). Next, she becomes unresponsive with a blank midline stare, and exhibits a number of complex automatic behaviors including flexion of the left arm, neck torsion, repetitive scratching movements of the right hand onto the right thigh, right leg bicycling movements, lip smacking, unintelligible speech and copious drooling. The episodes last from 30 to 90 sec. and are followed by 15-30 min. of post-ictal lethargy, confusion, headache and sleepiness without focal weakness. The patient is able to speak immediately after the seizure, but is amnesic for events that occurred during the seizure. She normally has 2-3 seizures per week despite maximal medical treatment and has had as many as five seizures in one day. She is otherwise healthy. Her goals are to finish college and to be permitted to drive (by law one must be seizure free for at least one year in order to have a driver's licence).

Family History: No family history of seizures or other neurological disorders.

Physical Examination: General physical exam, mental status and neurologic exams were normal. Formal neuropsychiatric testing was not done.

Questions:

1. What are seizures and what are the main types of seizures seen in adults?
2. What causes seizures and why do you think the limbic system is particularly seizure prone?