



Cataplexy

Cataplexy is a sudden loss of muscle tone that may lead to falls

What may happen

Cataplexy is an abrupt, but temporary, loss of muscle tone that occurs when a person experiences an emotional stimulation, such as laughter, pleasure, anger or excitement. This stimulation leads to a rapid loss of muscle control, often causing the affected person to collapse as a result. This happens because the person cannot voluntarily control the muscles which would enable them to remain standing.

Once the effect of the stimulation has worn off – which should only take a minute or two – the person will regain control, but may be shaken. However, there is a danger of serious injury, should the person strike their head when they fall, or land in an awkward position.

What you can do

Medication can be prescribed to control cataplexy, and protective headgear is available that can help to reduce the risk of injury. One medication that has been shown to help with cataplexy is imipramine. Please seek further advice from your GP, consultant or nurse specialist regarding any medication.

Cataplexy can be confused with seizures. Generally, cataplexy will occur during periods of stimulation only, will happen rapidly, and the person will recover quickly. A seizure can occur during a quiet period or a period of stimulation, there may be more warning signs, and the person may recover more slowly.



How we managed ... one family's story

L is a very happy child and does laugh a lot – especially when she is with her friends at school. She knew that she would collapse every time she laughed so she sadly made the conscious effort not to laugh and was very good at controlling it. The floors in her school were stone and she did have some nasty falls. To make up for it, as soon as she got home from school, we would all sit on the big settee and have a joke session because then she could laugh as much as she wanted, fall sideways and not injure herself. After mentioning these episodes to her consultant, L was diagnosed with cataplexy. She now takes a medication that has significantly reduced the frequency of these episodes, meaning she can now laugh freely while at school!

Who can help?

Your consultant, GP, community nurse or the NPDG (UK) clinical nurse specialist will be able to provide advice about medication. An occupational therapist could assist with protective headgear.

This leaflet forms part of a resource pack published by the Niemann-Pick Disease Group (UK). It is intended to be read in conjunction with the other parts of the pack. If you do not have the other documents in the pack or you would like further information, please contact us at the email address below.

niemann-pick@zetnet.co.uk

June 2011