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Petit Mal Seizure



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Synonyms

[Absence seizure](#); [Petit mal epilepsy](#)

Definition

A *petit mal seizure* is the lay term for an *absence seizure*. It is called “petit mal” (“small illness” in French) to distinguish it from a *grand mal* (“big illness” in French) *generalized tonic-clonic seizure*. The term “petit mal” is actually a misnomer because absence seizures can occur with other seizure types in more debilitating disorders (e.g., Lennox-Gastaut syndrome). To further complicate classification, many patients will use the term “petit mal” when describing *complex or simple partial seizures* (focal seizures with or without retained awareness/responsiveness),¹ *myoclonic seizures*, or other seizure types that are not as dramatic as the generalized tonic-clonic seizure

¹The International League Against Epilepsy suggested new terminology for seizure types (Berg et al. 2010). These new terms have not yet been fully adopted but are given in parentheses.

that the public usually pictures as a seizure. It is more accurate to use the term to avoid ambiguity.

Current Knowledge

See chapter “► [Absence Seizure](#).”

Cross-References

- [Complex Partial Seizure](#)
- [Epilepsy](#)
- [Generalized Tonic-Clonic Seizure](#)
- [Grand Mal Seizure](#)
- [Myoclonic Seizure](#)
- [Simple Partial Seizure](#)

References and Readings

Berg, A. T., Berkovic, S. F., Brodie, M. J., Buchhalter, J., Cross, J. H., van Emde, B. W., Engel, J., French, J., Glauser, T. A., Mathern, G. W., Moshe, S. L., Nordli, D., Plouin, P., & Scheffer, I. E. (2010). Revised terminology and concepts for organization of seizures and epilepsies: Report of the ILAE commission on classification and terminology, 2005–2009. *Epilepsia*, 51(4), 676–685.

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