Triggering Factors

Careful and detailed documentation of seizures over time may indicate a pattern of seizures. About half of the people 12 years old and older with epilepsy can recognize at least one trigger for their seizures (Wassenaar, Kasteleijn-Nolst Trenité, de Haan, et al, 2014). When this occurs, the child, nurse, or responsible adult can intervene to make changes in the lifestyle or environment that may prevent seizures or decrease their frequency. Often the necessary changes are simple but can make an enormous difference in the lives of the child and family.

The most common factors that may trigger seizures in children include physical psychological stress, sleep deprivation, fever, and illness (Novakova, Harris, Ponnusamy, et al, 2013). Other precipitating factors include flickering lights, menstrual cycle, and alcohol (Wassenaar, Kasteleijn-Nolst Trenité, de Haan, et al, 2014). Some individuals have pattern- or photo-sensitive epilepsy, that is, seizures precipitated by changes in dark/light patterns, such as those that occur with a flash on a camera, automobile headlights, reflections of light on snow or water, or rotating blades on a fan. Most of these individuals have absence, myoclonic, or generalized tonic-clonic seizures. A small minority of children have seizures while playing video games. Only these children need to be restricted from playing video games.

Febrile Seizures

A febrile seizure is a seizure associated with a febrile illness in a child who does not have a CNS infection. By definition, children who have a febrile seizure cannot have a history of neonatal or unprovoked seizures (Syndi Seinfeld and Pellock, 2013). Febrile seizures are the single most common seizure type, occurring in 2% to 5% of children between the ages of 1 month and 5 years (Syndi Seinfeld and Pellock, 2013).

There is evidence for both genetic and environmental causes for febrile seizures. Children with a family history of febrile seizures are at increased risk for both a single febrile seizure (10% to 46%) and for recurrent febrile seizures (Saghazadeh, Mastrangelo, and Rezaei, 2014). Environmental factors that have been implicated include viral illness and an age of younger than 18 months old