Epilepsy is a neurological disorder, meaning it is a disorder of the nervous system. The nervous system is a complicated network of nerves and cells that carries messages back and forth from the brain and spinal cord to other parts of the body. Epilepsy is not a mental illness. It is a physical illness.

People with epilepsy need treatment, but also understanding. They are normal, capable people. Unless someone has a major seizure in a public place, you will not know they have epilepsy. There is no permanent abnormality springing from the illness. Nor is there a limit to what someone with the condition can accomplish.

**Epilepsy Disrupts Brain’s Normal Operation**

Epilepsy is one of the most common neurological diseases, particularly among children. Epilepsy is characterized by seizures, during which the brain's normal operation is disrupted, often dramatically. When seizures occur in just one part of the brain, they can be very small and can even pass by unnoticed.
When seizures involve large parts of the brain, the result is an epileptic fit. First, the person’s muscles stiffen. Then, they lose consciousness and fall to the floor, and their body starts jerking rhythmically. These types of seizures are called “tonic-clonic” seizures, because the body is first stiff all over (tonic) and then has rhythmic jerking (clonic).

**Demonic Possession In Biblical Times**

Seizures can be frightening for those who have never witnessed one before. Historically, the loss of control of the body and brain that came with having an epileptic seizure was often misunderstood. The biblical story of Jesus performing an exorcism on a young boy having seizures, for instance, led some to believe they were a result of demonic possession. Only in modern times has epilepsy been truly recognized as a disease of the brain.

There are still misunderstandings, though. It is wrong to think, for instance, that something should be put into the mouth when someone is in the middle of a seizure. It is not true that the tongue can be “swallowed.” First aid is applied to prevent injury while the person is stiff and jerking, but when they go limp at the end of the seizure, they should be put on their side to prevent the floppy tongue from blocking their breathing. After a seizure, it may take some time for behavior to return to normal and sleepiness is common.

The causes of epilepsy are varied. The condition can be brought on by anything from a brain tumor to an inherited genetic condition. It can also be caused by an injury to the head.

In some cases, epilepsy is associated with other brain problems. Mostly, however, people with epilepsy have no problem participating in normal activities between seizures. However, those whose seizures are not controlled should not operate dangerous machinery, such as cars, or swim unsupervised.

**Medication, Surgery And Implants**

Most cases of epilepsy can be well controlled with medications. Options for treatment have expanded as new drugs have become available, and as the condition has become better understood. In some cases, epilepsy can be cured through an operation on the brain. In other cases, devices implanted in the brain can control severe epilepsy.

In some types of epilepsy, the networks in the brain that give rise to the illness may also make people more likely to have mood disorders. Of course, even when that is not the case, having epilepsy could make many people at least somewhat worried and sad. After all, they never know when another seizure may hit. It is important for doctors to consider both problems when treating someone with the condition.
Quiz

1. Which of the following answer choices describes two main ideas in the article?
   (A) Epileptic seizures are caused by interruptions in the nervous system; although epilepsy has been misunderstood, there are many treatments available today that help people live normal lives.
   (B) It is easy to recognize someone who has epilepsy because of their seizures; despite many challenges, with the proper medication epileptics are now able to survive.
   (C) Epilepsy was once believed to be the result of demonic possession; since epilepsy is known to be a brain disease today, it is no longer associated with mental illness.
   (D) It is possible for most people with epilepsy to live normal lives once their illness is under control; however, epilepsy is more likely to cause mood disorders.

2. Which statement would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
   (A) People who have epilepsy have a brain disease that can be treated with medication.
   (B) Epilepsy has frequently been misunderstood, but the public is better educated today.
   (C) People who have epilepsy must learn how to deal with the unpredictability of the illness.
   (D) Epilepsy is a common brain disease among children, but most seizures are minor.
3 Read the paragraph from the section "Demonic Possession In Biblical Times."

Seizures can be frightening for those who have never witnessed one before. Historically, the loss of control of the body and brain that came with having an epileptic seizure was often misunderstood. The biblical story of Jesus performing an exorcism on a young boy having seizures, for instance, led some to believe they were a result of demonic possession. Only in modern times has epilepsy been truly recognized as a disease of the brain.

Which word from the paragraph helps you understand that people once thought seizures were a sign of evil?

(A) frightening

(B) demonic

(C) possession

(D) biblical

4 Which of the following words, if it replaced the word "disrupted" in the sentence below, would CHANGE the meaning of the sentence?

Epilepsy is characterized by seizures, during which the brain’s normal operation is disrupted, often dramatically.

(A) interrupted

(B) broken

(C) damaged

(D) sustained