Infantile Spasms

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS)

Source

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS). Infantile Spasms Information Page.

An epileptic spasm is a specific type of seizure seen in an epilepsy syndrome of infancy and childhood often called West Syndrome. These are more commonly called infantile spasms (IS) since they are seen most often in the first year of life. West Syndrome/IS is characterized by epileptic spasms, developmental problems, and a specific brain wave pattern on electroencephalography (EEG) testing called hypsarrhythmia. The onset is usually in the first year of life, typically between 4-8 months. The seizures often look like a sudden bending forward of the body with stiffening of the arms and legs lasting for 1-2 seconds; some children arch their backs as they extend their arms and legs. Spasms tend to occur upon awakening and often occur in multiple clusters and hundreds of seizures per day. Most children, but not all, will have EEG readings of hypsarrhythmia. Infantile spasms usually stop by age five, but may be replaced by other seizure types. Many underlying disorders, such as birth injury, metabolic disorders, and genetic disorders can give rise to IS, making it important to identify the underlying cause. In some children, no cause can be found.