

# AS GOOD AS GOLD

## Toms River doctor treats Bayville girl with common pediatric epilepsy symptoms

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Jamie Haberbush knew something was wrong with her 4-year-old daughter, Alexa.

"She was just kind of zoning out," Haberbush said. "It looked like she was daydreaming for a couple of seconds at a time. The first couple of times she did it, I thought she wasn't paying attention to me."

The Bayville resident's instincts, honed by a job in the medical field, brought her to a different conclusion: seizures. She tried to make an appointment with a neurologist.

"I couldn't get in anywhere — it was a six-month wait," Haberbush said. "I couldn't wait six months. She was having a problem; it's not like this was for a checkup. It was extremely frustrating."

A tip from Alexa's pediatrician led them to Dr. Amor Mehta, neurologist and epileptologist at Community Medical Center's epilepsy center in Toms River. She called on a Thursday and booked an appointment for the following Tuesday.

After a few days of testing, Mehta diagnosed Alexa's zone-outs as absence seizures — brief disturbances of brain function due to abnormal electrical activity in the brain. They lasted from five to 25 seconds each, and she was having more than 200 a day. He prescribed the medication ethosuximide.

"Within a week, I noticed a drastic change," Haberbush said. "She was maybe having five a day, if that. Now I don't see any at all, ever."

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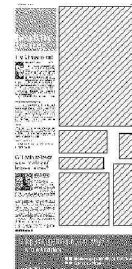
### What are the symptoms of a seizure?

A child may have varying degrees of symptoms depending on the type of seizure. The following are general symptoms of a seizure or warning signs that your child may be experiencing seizures:

- » Staring
- » Jerking movements of the arms and legs
- » Stiffening of the body
- » Loss of consciousness
- » Breathing problems or breathing stops
- » Loss of bowel or bladder control
- » Falling suddenly for no apparent reason, especially when associated with loss of consciousness
- » Not responding to noise or words for brief periods
- » Appearing confused or in a haze
- » Nodding the head rhythmically, when associated with loss of awareness or even loss of consciousness
- » Periods of rapid eye blinking and staring

During the seizure, the child's lips may become bluish and breathing may not be normal. The movements are often followed by a period of sleep or disorientation. The symptoms of a seizure may resemble other problems or medical conditions. Always consult your child's doctor for a diagnosis.

Source: [BarnabasHealth.org](http://BarnabasHealth.org).



Alexa, now 5, is out of the woods. She just finished kindergarten and enjoys gymnastics and martial arts. For Mehta, who been ramping up Community Medical Center's epilepsy program since he came on board in 2013, there is much work to be done.

### Widespread issue

"One in 26 Americans live with epilepsy, probably more," Mehta said. "Seizures are probably overdramatized as being convulsive, but the majority are not convulsive in nature."

Absence seizures, he said, are a common pediatric epilepsy symptom.

"They can affect a child's ability to learn and ability to grow into a well-developed young man or woman," Mehta said. "Alexa was losing about 30 to 45 minutes a day spent seizing. You could imagine, in a classroom setting, how much (her learning) is disjointed."

The key to diagnosing Alexa was the use of video

EEG monitoring — a tool that captures video of the patient and correlates it with a record of the brain's electrical activity.

"It gives epilepsy specialists the ability to classify the type of seizure the patient is having," Mehta explained.

"Proper classification of epilepsy guides proper treatment. Many times people are put on the wrong medications because they have not been properly classified, and the seizures can get worse."

Expanding Community Medical Center's use of video EEG monitoring was a priority for Mehta when he arrived.

"Since I came, we expanded (from two beds) to a six-machine unit," he said.

"We have the ability to do four adult patients at one time, three pediatric patients at one time, or up to six ICU patients at one time. Or any combination."

### A prime spot

Mehta said Toms River is a prime spot for the center because of Ocean County's large geriatric and pediatric populations.

"The worst part of epi-

lepsy is people taking too long to refer their patients to the proper specialist," he said. "With epilepsy that is uncontrolled, there tends to be a slow decline in one's cognitive abilities."

Alexa, he said, will "more likely than not" grow out of her epilepsy in a few more years, at which time she can come off her medication.

In the meantime, Jamie Haberbush is spreading the word.

"On Facebook I'm part of a mommy group; there's over 800 women in it and I put Alexa's story out there," she said. "People were like, 'Thank you so much for that insight.'"

As for Alexa, "she's doing great," Jamie said. "She's active and a wonderful student."

For more information on Community Medical Center's epilepsy center, visit [www.barnabashealth.org/Community-Medical-Center](http://www.barnabashealth.org/Community-Medical-Center).

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Alexa Haberbush is now a happy, healthy gymnast.  
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Alexa Haberbush with her mom, Jamie