

Everyday life

As you go through different stages of your life, having epilepsy may affect you in different ways. However, whatever your age, you may find a bit of forward planning can help you enjoy whatever you do, without too many problems.

Try not to let epilepsy undermine your self-esteem or use it as an excuse to avoid new people or situations. Approaching experiences in a positive, confident way may help you to get the most out of them – and it can also prevent other people from feeling anxious about your epilepsy.

It may help to consider the following:

- Avoid things that might trigger your seizures if you can, but don't become obsessed by this.
- Keep stress to a minimum, but bear in mind you can't avoid it altogether.
- Try to learn ways to cope with stress if it is a problem.
- Eat regular meals and a healthy diet.
- Exercise and sport are good for everyone's general health, including people with epilepsy.
- Lack of sleep is a common trigger of seizures, so try to avoid getting over-tired.
- Check you have enough medication, if you are going to be away from home.
- Have a plan for dealing with seizures (if you live alone it may help to arrange a call system with a friend or neighbour if you get a warning).
- Keep a sense of perspective – no-one's life can ever be entirely risk-free. Be sensible about what you do but don't let epilepsy rule your existence.

Safety matters

Most accidents take place in the home - whether or not you have epilepsy. The following tips will help make your surroundings as safe as possible to avoid needless injury:

In the kitchen:

- Think about getting a microwave (it's safer than an ordinary cooker if you have a seizure while cooking).
- With a conventional hob use a cooker guard; use the back burners; turn saucepan handles towards the back of the cooker.
- Carry plates to the hot pans - avoid carrying hot pans.

In the living room:

- Avoid open fires. If you have one use a secured fireguard.
- Avoid trailing wires and flexes.
- Fit safety glass in windows and doors.
- Fit soft floor and furnishings where possible.

In the bedroom, if you have sleep seizures:

- Choose a wide, low-level bed.
- Have something soft near the bed, should you fall out during the seizure.
- Avoid bedside furniture that may cause you injury if you should fall out of bed.

In the bathroom:

- To minimise the risk of drowning, ask a family member, or housemate, to stay in, or just outside, the bathroom while you are bathing.
- If you live alone, showers are generally safer but make sure the temperature control is working efficiently.

- Don't have the water too hot.
- When taking a bath turn off the taps before you get in. Keep the water shallow.
- Fit a door that opens outwards so it will not be blocked if you fall behind it.

In the garden:

- Use a power-breaker with electric tools or gadgets.
- Plan your garden with care - grass is better than paving.

Out and about:

- Only carry as many drugs as you need if you are away.
- If your seizures are not controlled, it may help to carry an identity card or wear identity jewellery (information on these can be obtained from Epilepsy Action)

Practical issues

There are many areas in your life that may be affected by your epilepsy. Dealing with these issues can make a difference. Don't let fear of having a seizure keep you at home.

Sport and leisure

Sports and leisure activities are good for everyone's health as well as being a great way to make friends. People with epilepsy can enjoy most sports with no problem. You need to consider that if you have active epilepsy, would you be safe if a seizure occurred while taking part in the sport of your choice? However, with a bit of forward planning, you can play many sports.

If your epilepsy was caused by head injury and you wish to take part in contact sport, for example karate, you would be advised to discuss this with your doctor.

Alcohol

Anyone taking drugs that act on the brain, such as anti-epileptic drugs, is likely to be more sensitive to the effects of alcohol. The intoxicating effects of the alcohol will be increased. It is also worth bearing in mind that alcohol can increase the risk of side effects from anti-epileptic drugs.

Most people with epilepsy find that they can drink one or two units of alcohol, sometimes more, without this increasing the chances of a seizure. Other people find that even a small amount of alcohol can trigger a seizure.

Binging on alcohol can cause a seizure, even in people who do not have epilepsy. These seizures can be due to alcohol withdrawal, the toxic effects of alcohol, or too much fluid, resulting in chemical changes in the body.

Driving

If you live in the UK and you have just been diagnosed with epilepsy, you must not drive by law. You need to inform the DVLA - Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority in Swansea or DVLNI if you live in Northern Ireland, as soon as you can. You can reapply for your licence after one year free of seizures.

Most countries have laws regarding epilepsy and driving and if you live outside the UK you should ask your doctor or your local epilepsy organisation how to obtain further information.

These regulations are made because, unless your seizures are fully controlled, you may have a seizure while driving. This could be fatal, for you or your passengers as well as other drivers on the road. It can be very hard to accept this change if you are used to driving but ultimately it could save lives.

Employment

Most people with epilepsy manage to work successfully in a whole range of jobs. Only the armed forces are actually barred by law to people with epilepsy. In the UK the Disability Discrimination Act is there to protect people from being discriminated against when they apply for work. However, employers do need to consider the health and safety of all their employees before offering someone employment, or allocating them to certain jobs.

Insurance

It can sometimes be hard to find an insurance company willing to insure people with epilepsy, because it's often thought they are too risky a prospect. In fact this is a myth. However, it pays to check the details of the insurance policy. This is so you don't have to pay too large a premium, or find you aren't insured because of an exclusion clause for people with epilepsy.

Welfare benefits

In the UK, if you have epilepsy you can claim free prescriptions and special concessions for travel. You may also qualify for other benefits if your seizures are poorly controlled, for example, Disability Living Allowance/Attendance Allowance. Of course, if you don't work or you are on a low income you will be entitled to all the usual benefits as well. The precise benefits you can claim will depend on your individual circumstances.

You can get further details from your local Benefits Agency, welfare rights worker at the social services department, your local Citizens' Advice Bureau or from Epilepsy Action on the [Freephone Helpline – 0808 800 5050](tel:08088005050).

NICE

Following a first seizure

1.4.1 Individuals presenting to an Accident and Emergency department following a suspected seizure should be screened initially. This should be done by an adult or paediatric physician with onward referral to a specialist when an epileptic seizure is suspected or there is diagnostic doubt.

1.4.2 Protocols should be in place that ensure proper assessment in the emergency setting for individuals presenting with an epileptic seizure (suspected or confirmed).

1.4.4 A It is recommended that all people having a first seizure should be seen as soon as possible by a specialist in the management of the epilepsies to ensure precise and early diagnosis and initiation of therapy as appropriate to their needs.

1.4.4C It is recommended that all children who have had a first non-febrile seizure should be

seen as soon as possible by a specialist in the management of the epilepsies to ensure precise and early diagnosis and initiation of therapy as appropriate to their needs.

1.4.5 At the initial assessment for a recent onset seizure, the specialist should have access to appropriate investigations.

For adults, a specialist is defined throughout as a medical practitioner with training and expertise in epilepsy. For children, a specialist is defined throughout as a paediatrician with training and expertise in epilepsy.

The GDG considered that with a recent onset suspected seizure, referrals should be urgent, meaning that patients should be seen within 2 weeks.

1.4.6 In an individual presenting with an attack, a physical examination should be carried out. This should address the individual's cardiac, neurological and mental status, and should include a developmental assessment where appropriate.

1.4.7 Essential information on how to recognise a seizure, first aid, and the importance of reporting further attacks should be provided to a person who has experienced a possible first seizure, and their family/carer/parent as appropriate. This information should be provided while the individual is awaiting a diagnosis and should also be provided to their family and/or carers.