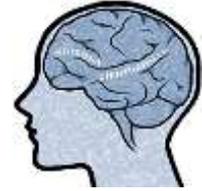


Epilepsy management advice



Emergency seizure management

Many seizures stop by themselves without causing any injury. A witness should call 999 or 111 if he/she is worried, or the seizure causes injury, or the seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes. The head should be cushioned and dangerous objects moved away. Do not move the person having a seizure unless necessary, but place in the recovery position after the seizure stops.

Avoid triggers and use a seizure diary

Many people with epilepsy find that there are triggers that tend to cause their seizures. Triggers are factors that are present in the few hours or days before a seizure usually. Keeping a seizure diary can be helpful to help identify triggers and also to record seizure frequency for different types.

A popular app that I found easy to use is 'Seizure Tracker' (for iPhone and Android phones).

The commonest triggers are emotional stress (75%), poor sleep or tiredness (75%), missed anti-seizure medicines (50%), periods (50% of women), fever/infection (25%) and alcohol (25%). Flashing lights may cause seizures in 1% of people with epilepsy. Covering one eye can help.

Remember your medicines and bring them to appointments

It is very helpful for us to see exactly which medicines are being taken by people with epilepsy. In one UK hospital, a study found that 1 in 6 prescriptions for anti-seizure drugs needed corrections.

Anti-seizure drugs and supply problems

More info: <https://www.epilepsy.org.uk/news/blogs/Drugwatch>

Occasionally, certain drugs have supply or availability issues. The web link above has up-to-date information on any issues with medications. You may contact us for advice in this situation.

Drugs and alcohol

Drinking more than 2 units (1 can of beer or 1 large glass of wine or 1 cocktail) can increase the risk of seizures. Alcohol is a seizure trigger itself, and may disturb sleep or may also interact with anti-seizure medicines. Usually alcohol with anti-seizure medicines makes people more drowsy. Amphetamines, cannabis, cocaine and ecstasy increase the risk of seizures. Some herbs do this too.

Some prescribed medicines may increase seizure risk. Examples are antimalarials, baclofen, bupropion, clomipramine, isoniazid, lithium, quinolones, theophyllines and tramadol. Other drugs may interact with anti-seizure drugs and stop them working.

Driving

More info: www.gov.uk/epilepsy-and-driving

You must stop driving for one year from the date of the most recent seizure and inform the DVLA. You must stop driving for 6 months if stopping an anti-seizure medicine even if you have had no seizures for over a year. Driving restrictions are different for buses, coaches, lorries, minicabs and taxis.

There are a few exceptions and if you think they apply, then discuss them with me first. Sometimes, a first-ever seizure or a seizure after reducing a drug may mean only 6 months off driving. Sleep-related seizures and 'focal aware' seizures may mean you could drive in the future even if seizures have not stopped.

Safety advice

More info: www.epilepsy.org.uk/info/daily-life/safety

Seizures can be unpredictable and occur without any trigger or warning, even if all previous seizures did have a trigger or warning. So it is important to be careful. We recommend having showers instead of baths and leaving the door unlocked with a 'Busy' sign. Microwaves are safer than gas cookers. Do not stand at the edge of platforms or walk on the road. Cycling should be on quiet roads with a helmet. Swimming should be supervised and in a pool.

Regular sleep

More info: sleepcouncil.org.uk/sleep-hygiene/

Shorter sleep time and poor sleep quality can increase seizures. A regular sleep cycle with at least 7 hours of sleep is recommended in adults. 'Sleep hygiene' is a set of tips to help with a good night's sleep and the link above has more advice.

Foreign travel advice

More info: www.epilepsy.org.uk/info/daily-life/travelling-abroad

It is especially important to make sure you have enough supply of medicine and avoid triggers (like poor sleep) before foreign travel. Ensure you have suitable travel insurance. Certain antimalarial drugs are not recommended. Clearance is needed to travel within 24hrs of a tonic-clonic seizure.

Sudden death in epilepsy (also called SUDEP)

Unfortunately, seizures may rarely not only cause injury but may even cause death. This may be because a seizure shuts down brain centres responsible for breathing. This is more likely if a person has tonic-clonic seizures, has frequent seizures and has night-time seizures. The average risk of this is 1 in 1000 each year. Reducing this risk is an important reason for taking anti-seizure medications.

Bone health

Certain anti-seizure medications (carbamazepine, phenytoin, phenobarbital, sodium valproate) can cause osteoporosis in the long run. Bone density scans, calcium tablets or medicines may be needed.

Contraception and pregnancy

Many anti-seizure medications interact with hormone-based contraception, such as the pill, 'mini pill', 'morning after pill', implants, patches or depot injections. Contraception may be less effective or may stop the anti-seizure medication working as well.

Anti-seizure medications increase the risk of major birth defects in a baby from 3% to 4-10%. Sodium valproate must not be taken if planning pregnancy. Before planning pregnancy, let your epilepsy team know and take at least 0.4mg folic acid daily. Breastfeeding is recommended even if taking anti-seizure medicines.

If you are a woman with epilepsy who is pregnant, you can sign up to a UK register to share your experience and help women in the future. The link is here: <http://www.epilepsyandpregnancy.co.uk/>

Bus and rail passes

People with epilepsy who are not allowed to drive may apply for a disabled person's bus pass and a disabled person's rail card.

Apply here for a bus pass using your postcode: www.gov.uk/apply-for-disabled-bus-pass

Apply here for a rail pass: www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk/

Free prescriptions

More info: www.nhs.uk/exemption-certificates/medical-exemption-certificates

If you need to take anti-epileptic medications for epilepsy, then you are entitled to free NHS prescriptions. Your GP can give you a form (FP92A) to fill out for 'medical exemption'.