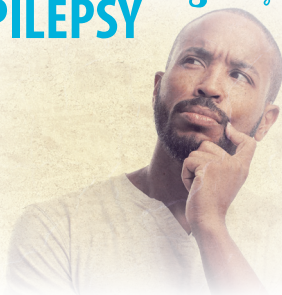


LIVING WITH EPILEPSY



holding your hand through health

LIVING WITH EPILEPSY



Seizures and Epilepsy

Having a seizure does not necessarily mean you have epilepsy.¹ Epilepsy is usually diagnosed if you have repeated seizures over a period of time.² Many times the cause of epilepsy is unknown, however it may also have been inherited or due to a brain injury.³

Are All Seizures the Same?

Not all epileptic seizures are the same.⁴ Some people may have milder symptoms, such as shaking in a part of the face or arm or a fixed, unresponsive stare for a few seconds.⁵ The most common type of seizure is where the person's muscles suddenly stiffen, begin to have jerking muscle movements and sometimes they may lose consciousness. This type of seizure is often called a "convulsion".^{3,5}

Common Symptoms Before, During and After a Seizure

Seizures typically have a beginning (Prodrome or Aura), a middle and an end (Postictal).⁴

In the Prodromal stage (or beginning stage), the person may experience a feeling or sensation that a seizure may happen soon. Often the first sign of the start of a seizure is an aura, which may be experienced in many different ways e.g. as a stomach ache, unpleasant smell, change in behaviour, or just a feeling that cannot be easily described.^{2,4}

Depending on the type of epilepsy, the middle part of a seizure may be experienced in many different ways. This may be mild e.g. daydreaming, or more dramatic, as it is in the case of convulsions.⁴

The recovery phase at the end of a seizure varies depending on the type of epilepsy you have. Some people feel a variety of emotions such as fear, depression, embarrassment, confusion and are unable to communicate straight away. They may also have a headache, nausea and extreme sleepiness.⁴

However, due to the fact that seizures affect people in different ways, not everyone may experience all three parts of a seizure in order, or even be able to tell the difference between the different stages.⁴

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What May Trigger a Seizure?

For most people, seizures happen without any noticeable trigger. They just happen.⁶ However, some people have recognised the following as possible circumstances or situations to avoid, as these may trigger their seizures.^{5,6,7}

Lack of sleep

Stress

Loud music and flashing lights

Alcohol and recreational drug use

Menstruation (periods)

Irregular meals, which may cause a drop in blood sugar levels

**Certain medications may lower the seizure threshold
(make you more likely to have a seizure)**

Forgetting to take epilepsy medication

Remember that a trigger is something that causes the seizures to occur regularly and not just once or twice.⁸

How is Epilepsy Treated?

Once your doctor has diagnosed epilepsy and established what type of seizures you have, he/she will discuss the best way to treat you.⁵ Your doctor may recommend anti-seizure medications which prevent seizures from recurring.⁵ Remember, epilepsy is a chronic disorder, which means that the treatment required usually needs to be taken regularly for a long period of time. There are many anti-seizure medications on the market and the ultimate goal is to find a seizure medication which works the best for you, with the least amount of side-effects.⁵ Almost 70% of people may become seizure-free by taking their medications regularly and as prescribed.⁹

Is it Safe to Exercise?

Exercise is an important part of our health and well-being.¹⁰ Having epilepsy should not stop you from enjoying a variety of sports. Obviously, there are certain sports and activities that should be avoided due to the risk of injury, should you have a seizure.¹⁰

Always use common sense and have an "exercise buddy" with you, especially for water sports and swimming.¹⁰



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Epilepsy and Pregnancy

Some epilepsy medications may interfere with certain oral contraceptives. They may also affect a developing foetus. Always speak to your doctor before becoming pregnant.⁵ The doctor may want to change your medication and prescribe certain vitamins to ensure you and your baby's health.¹¹

Take Control, Make a Plan

Having your own personal action plan can help you feel more in control of your life and your condition. Communicating your action plan with family, friends and colleagues will also enable them to help you better in the event of a seizure.¹²



Tips on how to take control of your epilepsy and formulate a plan

- **Knowledge is power.** Speak to your doctor to understand more about your type of epilepsy, the medication you are taking and any other health concerns, e.g. depression¹²
- **Wear a medic alert bracelet.** This will alert people to the fact that you have epilepsy if you are suddenly unable to communicate.¹¹
- **Educate family and friends** about how to help you in the event of a seizure.^{1,12}
- **Take your medications** exactly as prescribed and don't skip doses. Always inform a doctor or pharmacist of your condition before taking any over the counter or prescription medications.¹
- **Keep a seizure diary.** Record your seizures, noting the time of day and any other feeling or events that occurred before the seizure. This may help you identify any possible **triggers**.⁸



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Seizure Do's and Don'ts

Knowing what to do in the event of a seizure and educating family, friends and colleagues, will help prevent many unnecessary injuries.¹²

DO

- ✓ Remove any obstacles or sharp objects that may injure the person⁹
- ✓ Gently roll the person on his/her side and support their head¹³
- ✓ Time the seizure. If the seizure lasts more than 5 minutes, call for an ambulance¹¹

DON'T

- + Force anything into a person's mouth having a seizure. It is not true that a person having a seizure will swallow their tongue!¹³
- + Hold a person down while they're having a seizure.¹³

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

It may feel as though you are alone with your condition. You are not alone. Epilepsy is a very common neurological disorder and affects adults and children of all ages.¹⁴ Join an epilepsy support group to help alleviate some of your fears and help you to understand more about the disorder.

Speak to your Healthcare Professional about any concerns you may have about your medication, such as side-effects or if the medicines are not helping the seizures.

Epilepsy South Africa: www.epilepsy.org.za

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