

EPILEPSY

Safety For Managing Epilepsy/ Seizure Disorder



This information provides general information about epilepsy/seizure disorders to the public. The information shared here should not be taken as full medical advice. Only your doctor can give the medical advice that is right for you.

Seizures can take many different forms including a blank stare, muscle spasms, uncontrolled movements, altered awareness, odd sensations or a convulsion. There is an increased risk of injury with those who have epilepsy or a seizure disorder.

For many with epilepsy or a seizure disorder, their seizures pose a nominal risk of injury. For others, their seizures may require extra precaution to avoid injury. For instance, seizures that are reoccurring or those involving falls, loss of awareness, or postictal confusion after the seizure could result in injury. Precaution at home, workplace, educational settings, or while travelling or participating in various activities may be necessary.

Consider the risks associated with the type and frequency of the seizures experienced. Implementing the necessary safety procedures are important steps in assuring personal safety and well-being.

Personal Choices

- Maintain a healthy and well-balanced lifestyle. Get plenty of sleep, manage stress levels, eat a well - balanced diet, and try to avoid excessive alcohol consumption and street drugs.
- Always take your seizure medication on time and don't miss any doses.

- Monitor seizure triggers
- Inform medical professionals of your seizures and medication you are taking.
- Wear a medical identification bracelet or necklace.
- Teach others of appropriate first aid procedures and post first aid procedures in an obvious place in your home.
- Provide contact, medical and emergency phone numbers to those who may be with you when a seizure occurs.
- If you live alone, arrange for someone to check up on you on a regular basis.

Taking Seizure Medication

- Seizure medication should always be taken as prescribed. Sudden discontinuation of medication can result in seizures or status epilepticus.
- Use of any other medications or vitamins should be discussed with your doctor.
- Don't change from a brand name drug to a generic drug without first consulting your doctor.
- Keep a one to two week supply of your seizure medication on hand to assure that you don't run out.



Being Set

- Carry a pre-programmed cell phone to use in case of an emergency.
- If seizure medication or seizures affect your memory, use a watch with an alarm, day-timer, and a medication dispenser to help you.
- Although still difficult to obtain and expensive to train, seizure service dogs are successfully being used by some people with epilepsy or seizure disorder. The dogs are trained to respond once a seizure starts by seeking help or assisting in protecting the person during the seizure.

What May Trigger a Seizure

Some people are not able to identify specifically what affects their seizures, others are able to recognize definite seizure triggers so that seizures can be avoided.

Common Seizure Trigger

- Forgetting to take prescribed seizure medication
- Lack of sleep
- Stress, excitement, emotional upset
- Missing meals
- Low levels of seizure medication
- Illness or fever
- Medications other than prescribed seizure medication
- Excessive alcohol consumption and subsequent withdrawal
- Street Drugs (e.g. cocaine, amphetamines, ecstasy, LSD, withdrawal from marijuana)
- Flickering lights

Safety At Home

- ✓ Use of hot appliances and open flames increases the risk of burns or fire should a seizure occur. Smoking is also hazardous for those with seizures.
- ✓ Forced air heating is preferable to radiators, baseboards, and freestanding heaters. If your home has radiators, use radiator guards to increase safety.
- ✓ Bungalows or first floor apartments reduce the risks associated with stairs. Short sections of stairs with landings are preferable to long, staircases. If your home has stairs a safety gate at the top of stairs may be of help.
- ✓ Furniture with round rather than sharp edges is recommended. Sharp edges of tables and other furniture should be padded.
- ✓ Carpeting the floors, preferably with a thick underlay, may be necessary.
- ✓ Using appliances and tools with automatic shut-off switches provides additional safety.
- ✓ Use outdoor carpeting on concrete steps, porches, etc.

In Bathrooms...

- Take showers rather than baths. Showers are safer than baths for those with epilepsy or a seizure disorder, injuries still may occur. If you fall during a seizure, a lower shower seat with straps should be considered.

- Use a shower with a temperature monitor.
- Turn cold water on first and off last to prevent burns.
- Use rubber mats on the floor of the shower.
- Shower when someone else is home.
- Assure that shower and bathtub drains are working properly.
- Use a recessed soap tray in showers.
- Do not lock bathroom doors.
- Avoid the use of electrical appliances near water.
- Use mirrors and shower doors with safety glass or plastic.
- Use a padded toilet seat.
- Use ventilation to avoid overheating.

In Bedrooms...

- Use a monitor in your bedroom so that someone who lives with you will be able to attend to you if you have a seizure.
- Use beds low to the ground.
- Avoid beds with hard edges on bed frames.
- Avoid bunk and water beds.
- Avoid sharp edged night tables beside the bed.

In Work Rooms...

- Use a tabletop ironing board or one that is mounted on the wall.
- Use tools with automatic shut-off.

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- Sit at a low workbench.
 - Wear protective gear such as gloves, safety glasses, and boots.

In Parenting...

- Use safety gates and playpens.
- Use a stroller rather than carrying your child, even in your own home.
- Use a stroller with brakes.
- Keep supplies on each level of your home to avoid having to climb stairs with your child.
- Give your child a sponge bath, if you are alone.
- Avoid carrying or drinking hot liquids or smoking near your child.
- If you always fall on the same side during a seizure, position yourself to prevent you from falling on the baby.
- Change diapers on a pad on the floor or on a change table with a safety strap for the baby.
- Secure your baby into an infant seat on the floor or in a high chair for bottle feedings and meals.
- If you are breast feeding, feed your baby while sitting on the floor surrounded by a soft surface.
- If sleep deprivation is one of your seizure triggers, then arrange for someone to help out.
- Keep outside doors and gates locked.
- Keep your seizure medication out of reach from children.
- When your child is old enough to understand, discuss your epilepsy/seizure disorder with your child. It will help your child to know how to respond if you have a

seizure and post any emergency or contact phone numbers in a an obvious place.

- Explain to your child what should be done in case of a seizure and post any emergency or contact phone numbers in an obvious place.

In Kitchens...

- Use a microwave oven rather than a stove.
- If using a stove, use back burners.
- Place pots handle facing to the back of the stove.
- Serve hot liquids or food onto plates at the stove rather than carrying them to the table.
- Do not carry boiling water.
- If possible, cook when someone else is home.
- Use cups with lids.
- Sit down to do tasks when possible.
- Place sharp utensils downwards in the dishwasher.
- Wear rubber gloves if washing glass or using sharp utensils.
- Keep frequently used items within easy reach to avoid having to climb up to high cupboards.
- Keep electrical appliances away from sinks.

Photosensitive Epilepsy

Lights flickering at a certain speed and brightness can trigger a seizure in people with photosensitive epilepsy:

- Limit situations that expose you to flickering lights.
- Do not sit too close to the television.
- Do not watch television in the dark.
- Take breaks from using the computer.
- Monitor which video and computer games that could trigger seizures.
- Use computers with less flicker.

Safety at Work

- Avoid work that involves heights, heavy machinery, extreme heat, fire, or molten material, or being over water.
- Use safety guards and automatic shut-offs if working with machinery or power tools.
- If using machinery, wear appropriate gloves, safety glasses, boots, etc.
- Keep consistent work hours to maintain a healthy lifestyle and to avoid sleep deprivation. Learn coping methods to manage stress.
- Assure that co-workers know appropriate first aid.

Safety in Sports and Recreational Activities

- Take extra precaution in sports that increase the risk of head injury including contact sports such as football, hockey, karate, and soccer.
- Always use proper safety gear such as helmets, floatation devices and appropriate padding.
- Ride bicycles on side roads or bike paths and always wear a helmet.

- If you have uncontrolled seizures, swim with a partner that knows what to do if a seizure occurs in water.
- Swim in pools rather than open water.
- Exercise on soft rather than hard surfaces.
- Discuss participation in sports and recreational activities with your doctor.
- Inform lifeguards, coaches, counsellors, etc. of your condition and how to respond should a seizure occur.

Safety While Travelling

- There are restrictions to driving if your seizures are not controlled. Talk to your doctor.
- Carry a copy of important medical information, phone numbers, and a list of your seizure medications with you.
- Stand back from roads or the edge or platforms while travelling by bus or subway.
- Use elevators rather than escalators or stairs.
- Have someone accompany you if you are going to be outdoors during hot or low temperatures.
- If travelling by air, consider whether to inform airline officials of your condition.
- Carry some seizure medication on your person in the event of lost luggage. Take all seizure medication. Extra medication should also be taken in the event that some is lost or your stay is extended.
- Wear a medical identification bracelet.

Managing Seizures

It is important that a person with epilepsy or a seizure disorder knows the appropriate first aid procedures. They should also inform others who may be with them during a seizure of these procedures.

What To Do If Someone Has A *Non-Convulsive* Seizure

(staring blankly, confused, not responding, movements are purposeless)

1. Stay with the person. Let the seizure take its course. Speak calmly and explain to others what is happening.
2. Move dangerous objects out of the way.
3. **DO NOT** restrain the person.
4. Gently guide the person away from danger or block access to hazards.
5. After the seizure, talk reassuringly to the person.

What To Do If Someone Has A *Convulsive* Seizure:

(characterized by stiffening, falling, jerking)

1. Stay calm/ let the seizure take its course.

2. Time the seizure.

3. Protect from injury.



4. Loosen anything tight around the neck.

5. **DO NOT** restrain the person.



6. **DO NOT** put anything in the mouth.

7. Gently roll the person onto his or her side as the convulsive seizure subsides.



8. After the seizure, talk to the person reassuringly.

Epilepsy and Seizure Association of Manitoba

One of the major goals of the Association is education. There are over 23,000 Manitobans, of all ages, with epilepsy/seizure disorders. Here are some of the services we provide:

- Free Information Packages
- School Awareness Programs
- Community Education
- Print and Video Library
- Support Groups

If you have any further questions and/or would like to discuss epilepsy/seizure disorder with our Association, please feel free to contact us.

For more information
or to become a member
contact:



**EPILEPSY AND
SEIZURE
ASSOCIATION
OF MANITOBA**

4 – 1805 Main Street
Winnipeg, MB
R2V 2A2

Local: 783-0466

Long distance: **1-866-EPILEPSY**

FAX: 784-9689

Email: epilepsy.seizures.mb@mts.net

Website: www.manitobaepilepsy.org

Epilepsy and Seizure Association of Manitoba
is a member of
Canadian Epilepsy Alliance