

## Epilepsy, Sports and Leisure

This article is about sports, leisure activities and enjoying an active and healthy lifestyle. With the necessary precautions and awareness, there is little that people with epilepsy need to avoid.

### Benefits of physical exercise

It has been reported that physical exercise can reduce seizures in most people with epilepsy if continued on a regular basis (Nakken, 1999). It has also been known to help with mental health, decreasing stress levels, increasing self esteem and it can help with struggles with isolation due to exercise often being done with others (Howard et al., 2004).

### Examples of sports and activities

**Running/Jogging** – If your seizures are well controlled there is no reason why you can't go for a run or a jog, it would be advisable to let someone know what you are doing and where you are headed. If your seizures are not well managed, it is advised that you not run or jog alone.

**Cycling** – As long as you use the correct safety equipment for cycling such as hi-visibility clothing and protective headgear, and your seizures are well controlled, then it should be relatively safe for cycling on a road. If your seizures are not well controlled, it is not advised that you cycle until you gain a measure of control.

**Boxing** – Sports such as Boxing and MMA fighting are not recommended for those with epilepsy

**Fishing** – If seizures are well controlled, then keep in mind the general safety precautions involved with fishing.

**Gym** – If your seizures are well controlled, it should be safe to use most of the gym equipment safely. If they are not well controlled, you may need to ask the staff what a safe plan for working out would be.

**Team Contact sports (Rugby, Soccer, Netball etc.)** – There is no evidence to suggest that people with epilepsy must avoid team sports, as long as the necessary precautions are taken. If epilepsy occurred as a result of a head injury, a doctor may recommend you avoid contact sports.

**Swimming** - If your seizures are completely controlled, you don't need to take any greater safety precautions than anyone else.

If you are still having seizures you will need to think about safety measures. For example:

- When possible, have a companion in the water with you.
- Talk to the staff at your local swimming facilities about any special requirements you may have.
- Use a floating/buoyancy aid.
- If there is a lifeguard or pool supervisor present, make them aware of your epilepsy.
- If there's no qualified lifeguard present, don't swim deeper than the shoulder height of the companion swimming with you.
- Make sure that your companion knows what to do if you have a seizure and is strong enough to help you.
- Don't swim if you are feeling unwell.
- Avoid overcrowded situations, as it might be difficult for others to notice if you have a seizure

**If you have concerns or questions about any sport or activity, discuss it with your GP/Neurologist.**

#### References

Howard, G. M., Radloff, M., & Sevier, T. L. (2004). Epilepsy and sports participation. *Current sports medicine reports*, 3(1), 15-19.

Nakken, K. O. (1999). Clinical research physical exercise in outpatients with epilepsy. *Epilepsia*, 40(5), 643-651

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