

# Mental Health

Epilepsy is not a psychological condition, but it can place people living with epilepsy at a greater risk of developing one.

The co-existence of psychological conditions, such as anxiety and depression, in people living with epilepsy is not uncommon. It is estimated that around half of all adults experience depression and around 20% experience generalised anxiety disorder anxiety. Depression may occur as a result of altered brain activity associated with epilepsy. It can also occur as a side effect of ASMs – this is relatively less common but if you notice your mood is worsening after starting a new medication or increasing your dose, then this is important to raise with your neurologist, to discuss alternative medication options. Depression and anxiety may also arise due to the stress of living with a chronic health condition – in epilepsy; this is often related to the unpredictable nature of seizures and the worry about when another one might occur. In some cases, a diagnosis of depression can also increase the risk of seizure activity.

It is important to remember that depression and anxiety are treatable, and can be managed through a range of effective treatments with health professionals who specialise in psychological support. This may include treatment with medication, psychological therapy with a psychologist or neuropsychologist, as well as other lifestyle factors, including promoting better sleep and physical exercise. [Just a Thought](#) is an online course offering free therapy to improve your mental health. Should you require further help, please see your doctor who may refer you to a [Beating the Blues](#) course.

When considering medical treatment for depression if you also have epilepsy, it is important to discuss this with a specialist. This may be your neurologist or a neuropsychiatrist – a psychiatrist who also has training in neurological conditions. They will then make sure that you are on the best ASMs for your mood and decide if additional medication for depression is needed, and if it is, what the best medication for you is. It's also important to acknowledge that living with mental health issues may impact a person's willingness and motivation to take ASMs and manage their epilepsy effectively, which can in turn increase the likelihood of seizure activity.



0800 37 45 37



[national@epilepsy.org.nz](mailto:national@epilepsy.org.nz)



[www.epilepsy.org.nz](http://www.epilepsy.org.nz)