EPILEPSY NEW ZEALAND
Kia titiro ki te tangata | See the person

Stress



There is limited current scientific evidence explaining the relationship between seizures and stress. Some people with epilepsy, however, report that they experience more frequent seizures when they are stressed. How this might happen is unknown, but it is possible that stress-related seizures are caused by chemical changes in the brain which then makes it more excitable and prone to seizures.

Researchers are still unsure if and how stress reduction techniques could reduce seizure activity. However, it is generally advised that good physical and mental health is maintained to help manage your epilepsy, and stress management is an important part of this. People who have experimented with relaxation and other stress-reduction techniques such as yoga have reported a subsequent drop in their number of seizures.

Stress management cannot replace medication, but taking steps to reduce stress may help reduce seizure frequency.

REDUCING STRESS

Stressors are an unavoidable part of life, but there are many ways to reduce their impact on well-being. These include:

- Exercise – regular sustained movement, whether gentle or intense, can reduce the impact of the stress response, and improve your mood
- Meditation and mindfulness – techniques which slow breathing rate and quieten the mind can increase your ability to relax
- Time management – establishing priorities and living a more predictable life can reduce stress
- Cutting back on (or rearranging) commitments can be helpful to reduce stress

- Connecting with other people – receiving and giving social support can improve mood and enhance well-being
- Engaging in practices such as assertiveness training, mental imagery, anxiety management and working on self-esteem issues can reduce stress
- Participating in activities such as massage, singing, dancing and other enjoyable practices can reduce tension and encourage a greater sense of wellbeing
- Maintaining a healthy sleep routine will help when stressful situations arise which can't be avoided
- Always ensure that you take your medication on time.

KNOWING YOUR STRESSORS

You need to be mindful of your body's response to stress in order to understand your stressors. For example, you might have a rapid heartbeat, begin to sweat or feel flustered when you are feeling stressed. You also need to consider whether there were any events, changes in your life or environment that might have triggered the stressful feelings. Using a diary to record your can be helpful for identifying patterns.

OTHER RESOURCES

If you would like further help with managing stress there are many organisations that can help. The links below will take you to some websites where you can find helpful information:

Just a thought

Beating the Blues – Ministry of Health

Youthline

For more information about epilepsy and mental health, please see our health and wellbeing section.

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