EPILEPSY NEW ZEALAND
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Parenting



Many people with epilepsy become parents, and some may experience concerns about caring for their children due to their epilepsy. It is important to remember that becoming a parent can be daunting and challenging for anyone. Keeping your child safe may require some additional precautions, which can be integrated into your overall epilepsy management strategy.

Having safety procedures in place in the home can be useful. These should be based around your regular parenting responsibilities, particularly those that may have a risk involved such as bathing and feeding your child. Conducting a risk assessment in the home can be a useful strategy to become more mindful of potential hazards, as well as coming up with productive solutions.

In general, it is important to be aware of and avoid seizure triggers to maintain optimal management of your epilepsy. However, common seizure triggers such as stress, sleep deprivation and exhaustion are not uncommon among new parents. This can be particularly challenging for people living with epilepsy, but it does not mean that they cannot successfully raise children. Planning in advance and being as prepared as possible will be greatly beneficial to you and your child.

Of course, the joys and challenges of parenting are different for everyone. Likewise, not everyone living with epilepsy will face the same experiences. Someone with well-controlled seizures, for example, is likely to have fewer issues related to their epilepsy when parenting than someone who is uncontrolled. Furthermore, parenting issues and needs will change and evolve as your child grows.

Some general tips include:

- Make sure you get sufficient sleep and rest wherever possible. If possible, take a nap when your baby is asleep during the day.
- If you have a partner, have open and honest conversations about your epilepsy, and how parenting responsibilities might be managed to reduce potential risks. Also, be open to offers

of additional help, including from family and friends.

- If you are feeling especially run down, try to avoid being on your own with your baby.
- If you are alone with your baby, consider keeping them in a secure playpen or childproof room, particularly if you feel that you may have a seizure. This may help ensure they are safe should you have a seizure or lose awareness.
- Be close to the floor when feeding, dressing, changing or bathing your baby. This reduces the risk that your baby will fall from a significant height, should you lose awareness or become unconscious. Minimise carrying your baby and consider using a pram or stroller to move around your home.
- Some people like to feed their baby when they are seated in a stroller or baby seat, while toddlers can be fed from toddler seats and feeding tables.
- A Medical ID bracelet may be worthwhile, for yourself and your child, which can help you get assistance should you have a seizure in public.
- Some parents like to use a pram trap, which secures the pram to their wrist. Some prams or strollers also have automatic brakes that will activate in emergency circumstances.
- When you child is old enough, it is important to tell them about your epilepsy, and give them opportunities to voice any questions or concerns they might have. You may even want to train your older child to ring 111 or a family member if you have a seizure. Develop a simple plan and practice this with your child.