EPILEPSY NEW ZEALAND
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Epilepsy and hormones



Some women may experience shifts in their seizure activity due to hormonal changes, particularly during puberty, ovulation and menopause. Oestrogen and progesterone, which are female reproductive hormones, can have an effect on seizures because they interact with brain cells. It is still unknown *how* these hormones impact brain cells. However, when the body is making more oestrogen, brain cells become stimulated and this can result in a higher risk of seizures in some women.

Some women may have their first seizures during puberty, and this can be linked to changing hormones. Some may have *catamenial epilepsy*, which is a form of epilepsy where seizures are affected by a woman's menstrual cycle.

Hormonal changes also occur during pregnancy, but most women will retain their previous level of seizure control. Some may experience an increase, decrease or change in seizure activity. This can be associated with hormonal and/or medication changes.

There are mixed reports about how, and to what extent, perimenopause and menopause will affect someone's epilepsy. Oestrogen levels drop during these stages but it doesn't always mean a woman will have fewer seizures. Sometimes women experience a worsening of seizures while others may find that their epilepsy improves.

It is important to discuss with your doctor any changes in your seizure activity, regardless of your age or life stage.

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