Risks, Safety and Lifestyle



An important part of living with epilepsy is managing your lifestyle, so that you can enjoy life as much as possible, while also staying healthy and safe.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution, as everyone is different. However, there are some common seizure triggers (events that lead to a seizure) that you can look out for. These include:

LACK OF SLEEP

No matter how old we are, we all need sleep. Seizures are more likely to occur if you are tired or deprived of sleep. It is best to have a regular sleep pattern and to get enough sleep to feel rested. Being asleep during the hours of 11pm to 4am is particularly important if you are prone to seizures due to lack of sleep.

How much sleep you need depends on your individual situation, as well as your life stage. Young people generally need more sleep than older people. You can read more about this on the Health Navigator website, which has a lot of information about sleep and teenagers.

Wherever possible, try to prioritise a good night's sleep. Spending late nights in front of a computer playing video games, for example, can lead to fatigue, which is worsened if you have photosensitive epilepsy. If you are travelling on a long flight, make sure you get good quality sleep before and after, particularly if you find it difficult to sleep on the plane. See here for our travel tips.

If you are attending summer events for multiple days, it might be good to set yourself a cut-off time, so that you can get enough rest. Your friends will understand!

If you experience sleep problems, discuss this issue with your neurologist or GP.

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NOT TAKING YOUR MEDICATION, OR TAKING YOUR MEDICATION AT THE WRONG TIME

Sure, taking medication can be annoying. You might feel like your medication is not that important, or that you don't want to take it at all. Try to remember that your medication is supposed to look after you, and to help give you the best life possible.

If you are having issues with your medication, have a chat to your parents or doctor. Also – never change or stop taking your medication without talking to your doctor first, as stopping medication suddenly can lead to serious consequences.

BEING TIRED

Work, school, exercise, sport and travel can all take a toll on your body. Try to pace yourself and not take on too much at once. This does not mean that your epilepsy has to restrict your life in a big way. It just means you need to look after yourself.

STRESS

Growing up is full of ups and downs. The hard times can sometimes make managing your epilepsy a little more difficult. It is important to seek help when you need it, as there are plenty of support services available for young people living with epilepsy. People who might be worth chatting to include your parents, doctor, psychologist, or school counsellor.

If you want some confidential support for mental health and wellbeing, you can find the right agency for your needs through the Ministry of Health.

HORMONAL CHANGES/MENSTRUATION (YOUR PERIOD)

In some women, hormonal changes (such as getting your period) can affect their epilepsy. If you have any questions or concerns about your epilepsy, talk to your parent/guardian or your doctor for advice. Click here for further information about women and epilepsy.

ILLNESS OR FEVER

Most of us get sick from time to time. Some young people living with epilepsy are more prone to

seizures when they get sick, or have a high body temperature or fever. If this applies to you, have a chat to your doctor about what you should do if you get sick. Generally, it is a good idea to stay hydrated, rest, and ensure that you have someone around in case of an emergency.

DIET

Some people are more likely to have seizures if they miss meals and have a low blood sugar level. Regular meals and eating soon after getting out of bed in the morning will lessen the likelihood of large swings in blood sugar levels. You don't have to be a 'health freak', but try to drink plenty of water and maintain a diet that is rich in vegetables. It is also a good idea to keep healthy snacks ready for when you've run out of energy.

PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS

You might be prescribed other medications for another health condition. These medications could impact your epilepsy, and/or your epilepsy medication. Talk to your doctor if you have any questions about this.

FLASHING/FLICKERING LIGHTS OR GEOMETRIC PATTERNS

When seizures are triggered by flashing/flickering light or geometric patterns, this is called photosensitive epilepsy. This only affects a small percentage of people with epilepsy. If you have photosensitive epilepsy and are attending a gig or concert, it would be a good idea to check beforehand if any flashing lights are being used. Video games and even some films and television shows can trigger seizures in some young people with epilepsy, including those who are sensitive to flashing/flickering lights. Make sure that you stay at least 2 metres from the screen, with good lighting in the room, and take regular breaks.

ALCOHOL/TAKING ILLEGAL DRUGS

There is a good chance that you will be exposed to alcohol and drugs during your teenage years. Once you are 18, you can legally drink alcohol, although it is important to be cautious. Taking illegal drugs at any age can lead to health problems and legal consequences.

Sometimes, alcohol and drugs can make it harder for your medication to work, and can also lead to late nights, tiredness and missed doses of your medication. All of this can make seizures more likely, and put your safety at risk.

While some anti-seizure medications can interact with alcohol, you should never skip your medication on purpose if you are planning to have a drink.

If you are driving or hoping to drive, think about the effect of seizures on your safety and the safety of others. Also, think about your ability to maintain a social life if you lose your license. Weighing it all up can help put your choices into perspective.

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