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

What is Epilepsy?



Around 65 million people in the world live with epilepsy, making it one of the most common neurological disorder. Epilepsy is a medical condition that affects the brain and causes seizures.

Everyone's brain sends electrical messages to their body, which tell the body what to do. Seizures happen because of a disruption to electrical activity in the brain, leading to a change in a person's movement, behaviour, level of awareness and/or feelings.

Epilepsy is diagnosed by a medical specialist after a person experiences at least two unprovoked seizures. Epilepsy and seizures vary greatly between people.

Not all people who have seizures are diagnosed with epilepsy In New Zealand, around 10% of the population will experience a seizure in their lifetime, but much fewer will be diagnosed with epilepsy. At the moment approximately 49,000 New Zealanders or 1% of our population, live with epilepsy.

Epilepsy occurs regardless of age, gender, cultural or socio-economic background. Epilepsy can develop at any stage of life, but it is more common in children, adolescents, and people over 60.

There are at least 40 different types of seizures. A person with epilepsy may experience one or more seizure type. Their behaviour during a seizure depends on the type of seizure and the area of the brain being affected. Click here for more information about seizures.

Around 70% of people living with epilepsy will gain control of their seizures by taking anti-seizure medication (ASM). For the remaining 30%, their epilepsy is considered to be 'uncontrolled' or 'drug resistant' and alternative treatment options, such as neurosurgery or vagal nerve stimulation, may

be offered to reduce or eliminate seizure activity. Some childhood epilepsy syndromes are 'outgrown'.

Epilepsy impacts on people in different ways. For some people, living with epilepsy will not have a big impact on their life. Others may experience some physical, psychological and social impacts. Epilepsy can impact on a person's education, employment, lifestyle, health, social and family life.

Epilepsy is sometimes described as a "hidden" condition or disability, because it may not be obvious that a person has epilepsy, unless they have a visible seizure. Sometimes, even the person living with epilepsy doesn't realise they have had a seizure.

Epilepsy research can help transform and improve the lives of people with epilepsy. There are now many New Zealand and international investigations trying to better understand epilepsy, discover new treatments and find a cure.

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