

# Behaviours and epilepsy



*Epilepsy in later years and changes in behaviour can be related.*

*Supporting an older person with epilepsy who also exhibits challenging behaviours requires understanding and empathy.*

## *Behaviours and epilepsy in the later years*

Behavioural changes and issues may be directly linked to the older person's seizure activity and/or epilepsy medication, however they can also be linked to a co-existing illness such as dementia. These three impacts need to be understood and the older person supported to manage behavioural changes or issues.

## **What does this mean for the older person?**

Behavioural changes or issues may result from deficits in memory and higher level cognitive skills due to the older person's epilepsy manifestation or medication.

Memory lapses can often be misinterpreted as a sign of dementia, when they may actually relate to the seizure activity or epilepsy medication.

Behavioural issues may also emerge as the older person responds to their loss of independence or frustration with their changing environment. The older person may fear the unknown or how people will react should they have a seizure.

People living with epilepsy, of any age, can experience:

- difficulty with attention and concentration
- impulsiveness or poor decision making ability
- inability to plan and organise



*People living with epilepsy, of any age, can experience: continued*

- lack of energy and motivation
- sleep deprivation
- loss of time, gaps in memory
- inappropriate behaviour
- withdrawal and isolation.

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## What can you do to help?

There are a number of things that can be done to help understand and support an older person who is showing changed behaviour patterns and behavioural issues:

- Consider how activities which have been part of the person's life prior to a diagnosis of epilepsy can be adjusted to enable continued engagement.
- Structure tasks to allow additional time for understanding, planning and decision making.
- Allow flexibility in how day to day activities and outings are conducted, to allow for any behavioural impacts that may be outside the control of the person.
- Develop a plan with the person on how the behavioural changes or issues should be approached and managed; include this approach in the person's Seizure Management Plan (SMP).

If an older person with epilepsy has behavioural issues it may be helpful to follow these steps:

1. Identify behaviours of concern and what impact these behaviours have on the person's life.
2. Observe and monitor the pattern of behaviours to ascertain why they are occurring.
3. Identify factors that both trigger and reinforce these behaviours.
4. Talk with the person about the behaviour; they may not be aware of it.
5. Determine what can be done and develop a plan to support the person to manage the changed behaviours.
6. Seek advice and assistance from an appropriate professional if required.
7. Where behaviours are not under the control of the person, seek training for family and/or friends, aged care workers and carers to build their capacity to support the person.

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## Where to go for further information.

Epilepsy New Zealand

<http://epilepsy.org.nz/>

### **National Support Centre**

Epilepsy House, 6 Vialou Street, Hamilton  
Central, Hamilton 3204  
PO Box 1074, Hamilton 3240  
Phone: 07 834 3556  
Email: [national@epilepsy.org.nz](mailto:national@epilepsy.org.nz)