

Self esteem and epilepsy



The fundamentals of self-esteem are developed in childhood and stay with a person throughout their life.

A late-onset diagnosis of epilepsy can be upsetting and can cause anxiety in older people impacting their self-esteem.

Self-esteem and Epilepsy in the later years

A late-onset diagnosis of epilepsy can have a substantial impact on a person as it changes the known and understood world of the person, a world that has been built over a lifetime of experiences.

Epilepsy differs from other chronic illnesses or age-related conditions in its unpredictability. The older person may have no control over the seizure events; this is something that is often very hard for them to come to terms with.

The impact of epilepsy is also different for every person. This can leave the older person living with epilepsy feeling fearful, isolated and not understood, impacting on the way they see themselves and their level of self-esteem, confidence and independence.

Older people with epilepsy experience poorer sleep, decreased mental status and can have a higher prevalence of depression and anxiety. For an older person with low self-esteem these impacts can be intensified.

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What does this mean for the older person?

Mental health is very important and an instrumental part of maintaining a healthy self-image. Talking to a doctor and family or friends about what is happening and how living with epilepsy impacts life, is the first step in looking after mental health.

It is important to remember that epilepsy is one of the most common neurological conditions experienced by people today, so an older person living with epilepsy does not have to go it alone.

Self-esteem issues can present as:

- lack of motivation
- dependency on assistance to complete normal day to day activities
- unwillingness to participate in normal known activities
- risk taking behaviour
- attention seeking behaviour
- difficulty forming and maintaining friendships
- lack of self-care and/or risk of self-harm
- fear of rejection or judgement by others, concerns over stigmatisation

Concerns about ageing itself are recognised as having psychosocial impacts such as fears about becoming isolated, experiencing loneliness and losing independence which can be present in an older person's thinking prior to a diagnosis of epilepsy. For older people living with epilepsy the link between concerns about health coupled with managing their epilepsy can compound these psychosocial issues.

People with low self-esteem can experience protracted negative feelings which can exacerbate depression and anxiety and lead to additional feelings of anger, shame or guilt. Understanding this impact is crucial for providing the appropriate supports to an older person.



What can you do to help?

Aged care workers and carers can provide support by encouraging the older person living with epilepsy to discuss their feelings or concerns with those around them.

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

1. Encourage the person to talk about their feelings and concerns.
2. Determine what you can do, empathise with the person, and develop a plan to support them where possible.
3. Seek advice and assistance from appropriate professionals if required.
4. Where self-esteem issues are having a substantial impact on the person, seek training for family and/or friends, aged care workers and carers to build their capacity to support the person.

Further information

Epilepsy New Zealand

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

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