

# Staying active and epilepsy



*Being active and mentally alert can help with the management of epilepsy.*

*Staying active is also important for overall health and wellbeing.*

## Staying active and epilepsy in the later years

Staying active and mentally alert is good for mind and body. A healthy lifestyle also helps with the medical management of epilepsy.

A diagnosis of epilepsy does not mean an older person cannot socialise with family or friends or keep doing the recreational activities that they enjoy. People with epilepsy can continue to take an active part in leisure activities, sport and recreation with the right approach to managing risk.

## What does this mean for the older person?

An active lifestyle which includes activities that exercise the mind and the body. Activities such as walking, stretching, yoga, Tai Chi, bowls, swimming, and dance can help the older person maintain a good level of fitness.

A 20–30 minute walk every day is an ideal exercise for maintaining a good level of fitness. If this is too much to begin with it can be broken up into two or three 10-minute walks. In an aged care setting this could be a walk around the garden or participation in lifestyle and leisure activities. A good level of fitness improves the chance of maintaining independence, managing health issues and recovery from illness, as well as reducing risk related to epilepsy.



A healthy diet which includes plenty of fruits and vegetables, good quality fats such as avocado and olive oil, staying away from high sugar foods and limiting alcohol intake.

Sufficient fluid intake is an important part of living a healthy and active lifestyle. The body needs the right level of fuel and water to stay active.

The body also needs the right amount of sleep to maintain a healthy body which can engage in an active lifestyle. Older people living with epilepsy report poorer sleep patterns, generally people who exercise regularly and stay active experience better sleep. Managing poor sleep patterns is therefore an important part of achieving an active lifestyle for the older person living with epilepsy.

There are many strategies that can be tried to improve sleep, including:

- Understanding the internal body clock, everyone is different so it is important to know how much sleep the person requires to function effectively.
- Making sure the bedroom is conducive to sleep, with light, temperature and noise under control.
- Being mindful. Reduce mind chatter prior to sleep. Consider relaxation techniques such as meditation or gentle music.

## What can you do to help?

As an aged care worker or carer you can support the older person with epilepsy to:

- understand any risks that may apply
- complete a pre-exercise screening test
- find suitable activities to maintain an active lifestyle
- find appropriate supports so that an active lifestyle can be maintained post epilepsy diagnosis
- discuss any concerns they may have to engaging in activities post epilepsy diagnosis
- discuss any concerns they may have about having a seizure while engaging in activities
- maintain a healthy diet and weight
- support the person to quit smoking if needed, or refer them to a quit smoking program.

When the activity needs of an older person with epilepsy are understood and supported, an active lifestyle can be achieved, and continue to be enjoyed.

## 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)

This information sheet is part of a suite of resources that are targeted to aged care workers and carers of older people, to assist with caring for older people living with epilepsy.

The information contained in this publication provides general information about epilepsy. It does not provide specific advice. Specific health and medical advice should always be obtained from an appropriately qualified health professional.