



Disclosing your epilepsy - to get the job done!

Disclosing your epilepsy diagnosis in the workplace

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Every person with epilepsy must choose whether to disclose their diagnosis to their employer and co-workers. Some of the most influencing factors will be whether you need workplace adjustments at your job and whether your co-workers will need to provide support to you, should you have a seizure in the workplace. This disclosure guide aims to help you decide what will work best for you.

First, identify a **NEED** for disclosure. Consider your answers and decide whether you have a reason to disclose. Remember, if you choose to disclose your epilepsy there are discrimination laws that protect you.

If you decide that disclosure will help you in your job, consider **WHEN** to disclose. Then decide **HOW** to disclose.

Effective disclosure can establish a positive working relationship with your employer and co-workers.

- 1 Determine the **NEED** for disclosure
- 2 Decide **WHEN** to disclose
- 3 Choose **HOW** to disclose



1

Determine the NEED for disclosure: gather all the facts

Answer the following questions. A 'yes' answer in any of the yellow boxes *may* indicate a **need to or benefit** from disclosure. 'No' *may* indicate a need for more preparation.

Aspect	Questions	Answer
Job	Has the company participated in any disability related recruitment programs?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Job role	Have I requested a detailed job description for the position?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	Do I know what the essential functions and expectations of the job are?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	Does the job role indicate any risks where I or others could be injured?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	Will I need workplace adjustments (eg. lighting, later start in the mornings)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	Does my epilepsy potentially impact on the health and safety of workmates or the public?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
My boss	Does your boss use a flexible and personal management style?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	Can I provide my boss with additional information about epilepsy at work?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Myself	Am I familiar with my rights related to discrimination laws?*	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	Am I comfortable about my epilepsy—have I educated myself about my condition?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	Am I aware of my strengths and functional limitations?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	Will I need potential first aid assistance in the workplace?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	Have I explored strategies to self-manage my epilepsy?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	Have I practised disclosure with a family member, close friend or career professional?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

*How can your local legal aid commission support you?

Provides free phone legal information

Access to legal information online

Representation at legal mediation (in some cases)

2

Decide WHEN to disclose: consider the pros and cons

When	Potential gains	Potential setbacks
In a resume or on a job application	Establishes “up front” relationship and communication	Employer may have stereotypes about epilepsy and may not offer you an interview—you may simply not get a call back
Before the interview	Shows respect to employer, gives employer time to research, to ask appropriate questions or refresh their knowledge on discrimination acts	Employer had advance time to yield to his or her stereotypes about epilepsy—will they see you first, or your epilepsy diagnosis first?
During the interview	Opportunity to read employer body language, to time the disclosure and to disclose in a brief, positive manner	Employer may feel uneasy and ill prepared to respond with appropriate and legal questions
After the job offer	There is time for the employer to make reasonable workplace adjustments before the job starts	Employer may feel that you have been dishonest in the application process, which may erode trust
After the job begins	Gives opportunity to establish credibility before disclosure. Gives freedom to talk with co-workers about epilepsy related issues	May take time to arrange requested workplace adjustments. Employer may believe you have not been honest which may affect your relationship
When performance issues arise	Employer may be more understanding of work difficulties	Employer may have difficulty changing his or her perceptions of your work performance, feel betrayed, or wonder why you waited so long
Never	Your epilepsy information is kept private	You don't give your workplace an opportunity to understand or support you. In order for reasonable workplace adjustments to be made, you need to discuss the issues



Epilepsy New Zealand can support you:

- In working through this resource
- Referral to relevant organisations where you may be better assisted by another service
- Provide workplace epilepsy training to manager and workers
- Support in better understanding your epilepsy and managing your employment

3

Choose HOW to disclose: some ideas

Considerations	Example
<p>Disclosing to your supervisor is one thing (you expect this to remain confidential) —disclosing to your workmates is another and you should be the one who controls how and when your epilepsy (if ever) comes into the conversation. It is often a good idea to allow workplace relationships to get started before you reveal that you have epilepsy. Wearing epilepsy on your sleeve and just blurting it out on the first day on the job for many may not be the best way. Refer to the resource, <i>Epilepsy: who & how to tell</i> by Robert Mittan in 'The Epilepsy Report, May 2010).</p>	<p>“Since we will be working closely together, I would like you to know I have a medical condition you might help with ...”</p> <p>“There is something I would like you to know about me. There is a possibility that I might have a seizure while on the job. Hopefully it won't happen, but if it does I could use your help ...”</p> <p>“I have a common medical condition I would like you to know about ...”</p>
<p>Face employer concerns by talking about your compensatory strategies.</p>	<p>“I use an iPad to keep a list of tasks that I need to do so I don't forget tasks at work—it's really effective and works really well for me” (example for person whose memory has been affected due to their epilepsy)</p>
<p>Use general, functional terms to briefly explain the impact of your epilepsy on the job; avoid technical, medical diagnoses—always offer a strategy that will enable you to do the job.</p>	<p>“I notice a lot of the team meetings start at 8.30am. Due to my epilepsy, especially if I've had a seizure during the night, I can be very tired. In my previous role I was able to start a little later at 9.30am. Could we move the meeting times to 9.30am so that I don't miss out—I really value being part of a team and feel uncomfortable coming into the meeting at the end, when other people then suspect I've had a seizure—I really do want to contribute”</p>
<p>In a private setting, remind your employer about your right to privacy</p>	<p>After disclosing your epilepsy in your employer's office:</p> <p>“Thank you in advance for keeping this information confidential”</p>
<p>Frame any difficulties around how you work best</p>	<p>“I have noticed that I am having difficulty in completing my work tasks. I have a medical condition that requires frequent breaks in order to do my work. Would you allow me to work later to enable me to take more breaks? I always get the job done</p>

Summarise your situation to help you make your disclosure decision:

YES
I will
disclose



1

List the reasons why you **NEED** to disclose

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.....

.....

2

WHEN will you disclose your epilepsy?

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List the reasons for choosing this time

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3

HOW will you disclose your epilepsy?
Write a few phrases telling your employer about your epilepsy

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Practice your disclosure with another person

NO
I will not
disclose



List the reasons why you choose **not** to disclose

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For each new job, review the information in this brochure to determine whether or not to disclose

Notes

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Links

New Zealand Human Rights
Commission
0800 496 877 (toll free)

<https://www.hrc.co.nz/>

Legal Aid Information

<https://www.justice.govt.nz/courts/going-to-court/legal-aid/>



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

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

Special thanks to Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Centre, USA for granting permission to adapt their resource in the development of this booklet.

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 a qualified health professional.

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