

TREATMENT FOR EPILEPSY

Once a diagnosis of epilepsy has been confirmed, your doctor will recommend a treatment plan based on your medical, social and lifestyle needs. This leaflet describes epilepsy treatments and steps you can take to improve your wellbeing. Not all of the treatments listed will be suitable for you.

Anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs)

- AEDs are usually the first choice of treatment for epilepsy.
- The majority of people with epilepsy will have their seizures controlled by AEDs.
- For more information about AEDs see leaflet six in this series: 'Anti-epileptic drugs'.

Surgery

- Surgery for epilepsy has been carried out since the 19th century and has a good success rate.
- Surgery involves removing or separating areas of the brain where epileptic activity starts.
- Surgery may be an option if:
 - drugs fail to control seizures
 - tests clearly indicate where in the brain epileptic activity starts and removal of this area would not cause damage or disability
 - there are no additional significant disabilities or neurological conditions and no severe psychological or emotional complications.

A full assessment by a specialist team is necessary before the person with epilepsy and the surgical team can make a final decision about surgery. This assessment may take up to a year.

Vagus Nerve Stimulator (VNS)

- A VNS is a small device surgically implanted near the left collar bone in an hour-long operation.
- The VNS is attached to the vagus nerve and is programmed to send electrical messages to the brain to reduce the frequency and duration of seizures.
- VNS may be an option if:
 - AEDs have failed to control seizures
 - surgery is not an option.
- Most people will continue to need AEDs in addition to a VNS implant.

Ketogenic diet

- The ketogenic diet is sometimes used in children with difficult-to-control seizures that do not respond to AEDs.
- The diet is based on a high-fat, low-carbohydrate intake and needs to be carefully worked out and monitored by a dietician.
- Families and people with epilepsy can find the diet challenging to maintain, but recipe books with varied and imaginative meal suggestions are available, and success in controlling seizures has been reported.

Diet

- A balanced diet with regular healthy meals is of benefit in maintaining general health and wellbeing.
- Eating plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, regulating alcohol intake and avoiding foods and drinks that are high in additives are all recommended.

Seek your doctor's advice on the following:

- The body's vitamin and mineral stores can be affected by AEDs and specific supplements may be advisable.
- Women planning to become pregnant should take a higher daily supplement of 5mg of folic acid.
- Food allergies can occasionally trigger seizures.

Complementary therapies

- Many complementary therapies are becoming popular in the UK and may be of benefit to people with epilepsy. Seek your doctor's advice.
- The most useful complementary therapies for people with epilepsy are likely to be those that aid relaxation and reduce stress.
- Some complementary therapies may not be suitable for people with epilepsy, e.g., some aromatherapy oils and herbal remedies may provoke seizures.
- If you want to try a complementary therapy, find a qualified therapist registered with a national governing body and make sure he or she knows about epilepsy.

Support and counselling

- Support and counselling are vital to any treatment programme.
- Your local epilepsy support organisation can:
 - provide information about epilepsy, seizures and treatment
 - assist people to come to terms with a diagnosis of epilepsy
 - enable people to ask questions especially about their fears and anxieties
 - suggest ways of managing epilepsy and seizures
 - support families, friends and carers
 - provide epilepsy education.

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