

# EPILEPSY: BALANCING RISK AND SAFETY

Accidents happen with or without epilepsy. However, there are additional risks for people with epilepsy. An assessment of risk and safety is best made from a position of information and knowledge.

## HIGH RISK FACTORS FOR ACCIDENTS

**Presence of certain seizure features**                      severe  
 intractable (continuing in spite of medication)  
 unpredictable  
 no warning  
 frequent falls  
 clusters of seizures

**Presence of additional neurological disorders**                      dementia  
 head injury  
 learning disability

**Presence of certain side effects of high doses of anti-epileptic drugs**                      double vision  
 tiredness  
 sleepiness  
 dizziness  
 poor memory

**Presence of additional physical disabilities**                      poor eye sight  
 joint and muscle inflexibility  
 heart and circulation problems

**Presence of anxiety and depression**

## Smoking- and alcohol-related accidents

**Potential danger areas**                      home  
 school  
 workplace  
 leisure  
 travel

## A balanced view

Obviously a balance must be struck between living a normal life and avoiding risks. How can this be achieved?

- Know your seizure pattern (see leaflet three in this series: 'Recording seizures')
- Know why, when, where and how you may face risk
- Decide the degree of supervision you need
- Adapt your environment wherever necessary
- Adapt equipment where necessary.

## MINIMISING RISK FACTORS FOR ACCIDENTS

- Accurate epilepsy diagnosis
- Appropriate treatment by an epilepsy specialist
- Regular review of treatment plans
- Good understanding of epilepsy
- Support from GP and friends if anxious or depressed
- Support of family and friends
- Ensuring best possible health (see leaflet five in this series: **'Treatment for epilepsy'**)
- Carry an ID card or wear an ID bracelet

## 10 BASIC SAFETY POINTS

- Ensure floor coverings are fixed, e.g., use non-slip rugs.
- Provide adequate lighting on stairs and landings.
- Choose sturdy furniture – avoid sharp corners and clutter.
- Provide sufficient power points to avoid trailing flexes, and use equipment fitted with safety cut-outs.
- Use toughened safety glass in windows and doors.
- Firmly fix fireguards and radiator covers – lag any hot exposed pipes.
- Keep medication clearly labelled and securely stored.
- Install and regularly test smoke alarms.
- Keep an up-to-date emergency contact list near the phone with a note describing your seizures and treatment.
- Keep a well-maintained First Aid Box to hand.

See also in this series: leaflet eight: **'Safety at home'**; leaflet nine: **'Safety in school, college and university'**; leaflet ten: **'Safety at work'**; leaflet eleven: **'Safety in sport'**; and leaflet twelve, **'Epilepsy: leisure and pleasure – safety issues'**.

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