

# 8 EPILEPSY: SAFETY IN THE HOME

Safety in the home is a major consideration for everyone, but for people with active epilepsy, particularly those with unpredictable seizures, additional safeguards may be needed.

<b>Floors and upholstery</b>	Avoid hard surfaces, carpets which cause friction burns, rugs that slip and loose stair carpet fittings.
<b>Fires and radiators</b>	Avoid open coal and log fires and free-standing heaters which can cause severe burns if you fall on them. Provide secure guards to all fires, covers for wall radiators and lag hot pipes.
<b>Doors and windows</b>	Use toughened safety glass in windows and doors. Consider the use of safety gates to prevent accidents on stairs and balconies or in gardens.
<b>Electrical appliances</b>	Use cordless equipment with automatic cut-outs. Kettles, irons, hair dryers and DIY tools can be dropped during a seizure, causing serious burns, scalds, other injuries and fires. Additional power sockets are preferable to extension cables and multi-point plugs.
<b>Medication</b>	Keep medication securely stored out of reach of young children. Do not keep old medications. Consider using a drug wallet or dispensing box to help you manage your medication, especially if your seizures can leave you feeling confused.
<b>Furniture</b>	Choose sturdy furniture with rounded corners or use corner protectors. Avoid overcrowding of furniture and beware of hazards such as glass-topped tables and breakable ornaments.
<b>Lighting</b>	Ensure you have adequate lighting, especially at night if seizures cause you to get up and wander in confusion.
<b>Smoke/fire</b>	Fix smoke detector and fire alarms, especially if you are a smoker. Don't smoke in bed. Use call alarms for additional security.
<b>First Aid</b>	Keep a First Aid box handy and encourage family and friends to understand what to do when you have a seizure.
<b>999</b>	Keep a list of emergency contacts handy, e.g., family, GP, carers, neighbours, with a description of your seizures and what should be done in an emergency.
<b>In the garden</b>	Avoid rough/concrete surfaces, uncovered ponds and prickly shrubs and hedges. Use powered mowers with care – avoid trailing flexes and use equipment with automatic cut-outs.

## Bedroom

Smoking in bed is especially dangerous if you have unpredictable seizures. Avoid using soft feather pillows which can cause suffocation. Special breathable safety pillows are available. If you are worried about falling out of bed, sleep on a mattress on the floor. Hot water bottles are best avoided as they can scald. Turn off heated electric blankets before getting into bed. Make sure the room temperature is neither too hot nor too cold.

## Kitchen

Use a cooker with quickly controlled heat and with a cooker guard. Use the back rings/burners rather than those in front. Grill rather than fry food (avoid eye level grills). Turn pot handles inwards to avoid accidental knocking. Use microwave as much as possible even to boil water for cup of tea or coffee. Use a trolley to transfer hot liquids and foods from cooker to table.

## Bathroom

Choosing between a bath and a shower is a personal choice. But if you have frequent unpredictable seizures, be aware that baths pose an increased risk of drowning. Seek advice from an occupational therapist.

For people with unpredictable seizures a “wet floor” shower may be the safest option, and sitting under the shower may minimise risk of injury. Make sure the thermostat works. A foot-operated water flow control may be worth considering.

If you prefer a bath, ensure the water is not too hot by adding cold water first and don't fill the bath more than a few inches deep. Use a non-slip bath mat and consider cushioning taps and hard edges with a folded towel.

If possible it's a good idea to let someone else in the house know that you're taking a bath or shower. It's recommended that the bathroom door should not be locked (use a vacant/engaged sign – or sing!) and if possible doors should be hinged to open outwards. An alarm to call for help may be worth considering.

Help with bathroom adaptations may be available from your local authority. Contact your local Social Work Department.

## TVs and VDUs

See leaflet thirteen in this series: **'Epilepsy and photosensitivity'**.

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

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