

EPILEPSY: SAFETY IN SCHOOL, COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY

Everyone's experience of having epilepsy is different, so it is really important that you are assessed in terms of your own epilepsy.

ASSESSMENT OF THE RISK

The first step is to discuss your epilepsy, and in particular the kind of seizures you have, with the relevant person. This might be the special needs advisor, guidance staff member, student advisor, or a specialist epilepsy fieldworker. With them you can assess the safety needs you may require (e.g., access to a lift rather than stairs, somewhere to lie down and recover after a seizure has occurred). This will ensure that ways can be identified to meet your needs.

To ensure your safe participation in all your classes and educational programmes, it is also important for the staff member responsible to have regularly updated records from your doctor or consultant describing:

- your seizure pattern
- treatment
- any emergency care plans that may be required.

The next step should involve you, your parent or carer (if appropriate), a staff member, the school nursing service, a specialist epilepsy fieldworker and possibly your GP in doing a risk assessment on the overall environment, including:

- stairs
- movement around and outside
- laboratories
- domestic science rooms
- technical drawing, woodwork, or metalwork rooms
- toilet and shower facilities
- gyms
- travel to and from educational establishments.

There are very few educational activities which need to be denied to students with active epilepsy, provided precautions relating to the factors above are put in place and the guidelines below are followed.

COMPUTERS/VISUAL DISPLAY UNITS (VDUs)

Computers/VDUs are now an integral part of many educational programmes. There is no evidence to suggest that computers/VDUs can actually cause epilepsy, though they may be a factor in triggering seizures in some people with active epilepsy.

About 5% of people with epilepsy are photosensitive (*i.e.*, their seizures can be triggered by flashing or flickering lights or geometric patterns). A few simple precautions can be taken to avoid triggering a seizure if you have been diagnosed with photosensitive epilepsy:

- ensure correct adjustment of the chair and computer screen
- possibly make use of a screen protector to minimise glare
- take a break every few minutes from intense concentration on the screen by averting your eyes, or taking a short walk away from work station
- avoid working with a computer if you are overtired
- if possible use a computer with a flat screen or LCD screen as these don't flicker.

See leaflet thirteen in this series: '**Epilepsy and photosensitivity**' for more information about photosensitivity.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS

Physical exercise and activity are essential to promote health and wellbeing for all people, especially people with epilepsy, but if your epilepsy is active it is important to be aware of high risk areas, for example climbing heights in the gym. To minimise risk here, thick cushioning or mats and protective headgear are advised.

Taking part in most team sports and games is positive and healthy, but it is wise to be supervised. Seizures can be triggered during such activities due to excitement and heat, so having somebody around who knows how to respond should a seizure happen is always helpful.

Swimming is also a healthy and recommended activity, but it is important that you have someone with you who knows what to do if you have a seizure, especially if it occurs in the water.

Some high risk sports (*e.g.*, boxing, scuba diving) should be avoided. See leaflet eleven: '**Epilepsy: safety in sport**' for more information about epilepsy and sport.

It is really important that anybody with epilepsy takes part in school or field trips, excursions, camps, holidays, etc., once discussion has taken place about the possible risks involved and provided that all parties have agreed the appropriate safety precautions required.

MEDICATION

If possible avoid midday doses of medication – it's preferable for medication to be taken at home. If medication has to be taken during the day, provision for its storage needs to be made in accordance with the policies of the relevant establishment.

Medication storage and administration will also need to be considered in relation to any trips away from school.

EMERGENCY TREATMENT

If on occasions you require emergency treatment for your seizures such as rectal diazepam or midazolam, then it is vital that you advise the relevant person in your school, college, or university of this fact, so that whoever undertakes the administration and recording of any emergency treatment receives appropriate information and training.

TRAINING

To ensure that your teachers, lecturers, fellow students, bus escorts, canteen staff, etc., understand what epilepsy is, and how to help if you have a seizure, it is important that they have some understanding of epilepsy and instruction in first aid procedures.

A number of charities including Epilepsy Connections and the National Society for Epilepsy can provide training in epilepsy awareness, first aid for seizures, and the administration of emergency treatments.

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

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