

# Epilepsy: balancing risk and safety

In this leaflet Adina Nash, an epilepsy specialist nurse\* in London, talks about how people with epilepsy can minimise their risk of accidents.



Adina Nash

Accidents can happen to anyone, regardless of whether or not they have epilepsy. However, for people with epilepsy there are additional risk factors that need to be considered. These are outlined in the table below.

## High risk factors for accidents

<p><b>1. Certain seizure characteristics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Severe</li> <li>• Intractable (continuing in spite of medication)</li> <li>• Unpredictable</li> <li>• No warning beforehand</li> <li>• Frequent falls</li> <li>• Clusters of seizures</li> </ul>	<p><b>2. Presence of additional neurological disorders</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dementia</li> <li>• Head injury</li> <li>• Learning disability</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Presence of certain anti-epileptic drug side-effects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Double vision</li> <li>• Tiredness</li> <li>• Sleepiness</li> <li>• Dizziness</li> <li>• Poor memory</li> </ul>	<p><b>4. Presence of additional physical disabilities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor eye sight</li> <li>• Joint and muscle inflexibility</li> <li>• Heart and circulation problems</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Presence of anxiety or depression</b></p>	<p><b>6. Smoking- and alcohol-related accidents</b></p>

**NOTE: RISKS CAN CHANGE DEPENDING ON THE LOCATION/SITUATION**  
E.g. Home, school, work place, travel

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## A balanced view

**It is important to find a balance between living a normal life and avoiding risks.**

**The following advice can help:**

- Know your seizure pattern (see our leaflet entitled 'Recording seizures')
- Know why, when, where and how you may face risk
- Decide the degree of supervision that you need
- Adapt your environment wherever necessary
- Adapt equipment where necessary

## Minimising the risk factors for accidents

**There are a number of ways in which you can minimise the risk of accidents. These include:**

- Having an accurate diagnosis of epilepsy
- Having the appropriate treatment by an epilepsy specialist
- Having regular review of treatment plans
- Having a good understanding of epilepsy
- Having support from your GP, family and friends (particularly if you are anxious or depressed)
- Ensuring best possible health (see our leaflet entitled 'Treatment for epilepsy')
- Carrying an ID card or wearing an ID bracelet

## Basic safety points

**Below are 10 safety points that will help you to avoid accidents:**

- 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

**For more information, please read our leaflets entitled: 'Epilepsy: safety at home', 'Epilepsy: safety in school, university and college', 'Epilepsy: safety in sport', 'Epilepsy: safety at work' and 'Epilepsy and leisure – safety issues'.**

**This is one in a series of information leaflets about epilepsy.**

**To access the others, or to find out more about our research, please visit our website: [www.epilepsyresearch.org.uk](http://www.epilepsyresearch.org.uk)**

Text adapted from material supplied by Epilepsy Connections, February 2014.

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