



Seizures and Sleep

About Sleep

Have you ever found yourself wishing you had slept better the night before? Most of us know what it's like to have a poor night's sleep. Sleep deprivation or disruption can leave us tired and irritable the following day.

But if you have epilepsy, lack of sleep or troubled sleep may have an even greater effect - it may make you more likely to have seizures.

About Seizures

A seizure is a sudden change in awareness, actions, or feelings that you cannot control. A seizure is a sign that something has affected the electrical system that makes your brain work. When seizures happen from time to time, doctors say that the person has epilepsy.

For persons with epilepsy, many things can make seizures more likely to happen, including problems with sleep – either not enough sleep or poor quality of sleep. Better sleep can mean a better life – and fewer seizures

Sleep and Seizures

Sleep can affect seizures and seizures can affect sleep in many ways. Some people are most likely to have seizures just after they wake up in the morning. Some people have seizures only while they are asleep, in some cases without realizing it. All they know is that sometimes they wake up with aching muscles and a bitten tongue.

How Sleep Works

There are different kinds of sleep. *REM* (rapid eye movement) sleep, in which our eyes dart back and forth under our eyelids, is the time when dreams occur. Seizures are less likely to occur during this stage of sleep.

In the other major type of sleep, *non-REM* sleep, the activity of the brain becomes more synchronized. Seizures in sleep are more likely to happen during this stage.

Sleep Disturbances

There are many kinds of sleep disturbances. A very common cause for being sleepy is getting too little sleep, or having an irregular sleep schedule. Anxiety or excessive thinking can also make it hard to fall asleep. But even with enough sleep, there are other factors can affect its quality.

Sleep apnea is a condition in which people snore and briefly stop breathing for a few seconds at a time repeatedly through the night. This has the effect of disrupting the quality of sleep and possibly worsening seizures. Studies have shown that many people with epilepsy also have sleep apnea. Sleep apnea may be caused or worsened by seizure medications.

Restless legs syndrome is another common cause of poor sleep. People with this disorder feel discomfort in their legs at night and feel the urge to constantly move them. This can make it hard to fall asleep.

If you know you snore loudly or have pauses in breathing, or if you think you may have restless legs syndrome, tell your doctor. Diagnosing and treating sleep apnea or restless leg syndrome can improve your sleep. And better sleep may make seizures less likely.

Treatment Changes

When people with epilepsy have seizures at night, their doctors may suggest changes in how and when their medications are taken. A higher medication dose during the day might make someone too sleepy to get on with everyday life. A higher dose at night may help this problem. This may be especially helpful if seizures are happening at night.

The relationship of anti-seizure medications and sleep is complicated. Although they may make it easier to fall asleep, they can also decrease the quality of sleep. It is important to discuss these concerns with your doctor.

Things to Avoid

Inconsistent bedtimes, daytime naps, and caffeinated drinks can all make it harder to sleep well at night. Alcohol may make it easier to fall asleep but is likely to disrupt your sleep later in the night. The use of electronic devices right before bed or in bed is another common cause of disturbed sleep.

Tips for Good Sleep

- Avoid using electronic devices right before bed or while lying in bed.
- Keep a regular sleep schedule. Maintain a consistent bedtime and wake-up time and avoid daytime naps.
- Avoid excessive caffeine intake (especially after lunch) and excessive alcohol consumption.
- Try to do calming activities in the evening. This “wind-down” period will allow your mind to relax and make falling asleep easier.

Adapted with Permission from the Epilepsy Foundation in February 2016 (JL)

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