



## Seizures and Your Safety

We all live with risks in our daily life. Having epilepsy may increase the risk of injury for some people more than others. This depends on seizure type, frequency, characteristics, age, other health concerns, or cognitive difficulties, as well as the activities and the environment. Not every injury is preventable, whether or not someone has epilepsy. It is important not to excessively limit activities. This can have detrimental effects on physical and psychological well-being.

Some activities are more risky than others. Everyone has to weigh how much we value an activity against any risks of injury it may carry. In some situations, the answers are obvious. In others, they depend on individual health, preferences, and lifestyle. Use common sense.

Listed below are some safety tips for people with epilepsy, particularly for those who lose consciousness and/or fall during a seizure.

### Safety Every Day

Make sure friends, family, teachers, childcare providers, and employers know how to recognize a seizure, what to expect, first aid, emergency contacts, and when to call an ambulance. Wear medical ID and carry a first aid wallet card, which contains information on medications and doses, emergency contacts, doctor information, and any allergies or other health concerns. Avoid potential seizure triggers: forgetting to take medication, not getting enough sleep, excessive alcohol consumption, or using illegal drugs.

### At Home

As every home is different, take a walk around your home and make your own assessment of potential hazards to help with the implementation of a safety plan. Safety and independence is the ultimate goal.

Keep beds close to the ground. A mattress on the floor may be preferable. Avoid beds with hard edges on bed frames. Cover hard floors with heavy carpet or with non-slip rugs with extra padding underneath. Outdoor carpeting on patios or porches may also be useful. If necessary, pad sharp corners of tables and other furniture. Select chairs with arms to help prevent falling. A padded placemat may be useful while seated at a table or desk. Try to avoid climbing up on high chairs and ladders, especially while alone. Don't smoke, light fires, or use candles when you are by yourself. Use appliances and tools with automatic shut-off switches if they are not used for an extended period of time or if they could tip over, such as space heaters, irons, etc. If you live alone, have someone check in with you routinely. Consider getting a medical alert response system. Hang doors so they open outwards instead of inwards. That way, if someone falls against a closed door, the door can still be opened from the other side.

### In the Kitchen

If you have frequent seizures, use the stove when someone else is home as much as possible. You can also use the back burners more often. A microwave may be an easier and safer option if someone's seizures are not well-controlled. Pre-cut or prepared foods are usually easier to work with. Use non-breakable dishes and travel mugs for beverages.

### Bathroom Safety

Put an occupied sign on bathroom doors instead of locking them. Take showers rather than baths. Consider using a



hand held shower nozzle while seated in the shower, and/or shower when someone else is home. Install a safety device on the water heater to limit maximum water temperature to lessen the risk of burns if one was to lose consciousness or fall against the hot water faucet. Avoid using electrical appliances, such as a razor or hairdryer, near water or damp surfaces.

### **Out and About**

Do not drive if you are having seizures. Regulations in BC stipulate that one must be seizure free for at least six months to have a private drivers license. You must also have permission from your doctor, take medication as prescribed, and meet other driving and insurance regulations in order to have a valid license. Different restrictions apply to professional drivers, those changing seizure medications, and people with simple partial seizures. Public transit or carpooling may be the best way to get around. If you wander during a seizure, take a friend along when you travel. As well, if you are going be outside in extremely cold weather, go with a friend. If you have frequent seizures, the safety of taking a taxi instead of public transit may be worth the extra cost. Consider a home delivery service for groceries and prescriptions. Often these are free or low-cost. This can help you from having to carry heavy loads or make frequent trips, as well as save you time! Enquire about adapted or accessible transit services in your community, such as HandyDart or volunteer driving services: those can assist you with essential duties such as getting to the bank, government offices, or medical appointments.

### **Sports and Recreation**

Review the risks carefully before taking up sports that could put you or others in danger if you were suddenly unaware of what you are doing. These may need to be discussed with your doctor. Activities such as skydiving, rock climbing, and scuba diving are restricted for people with seizures. Other activities which require special considerations are those that occur near or in water or heights. Always wear protective safety equipment during applicable activities, (such as helmets, floatation devices, and/or knee or elbow pads). Use the buddy system with certain exercise equipment and activities, such as hiking. When exercising, take frequent breaks, stay well-hydrated, and avoid over-exertion. Exercise on soft surfaces, such as grass, mats, or wood chips. If you are going to swim, make sure a lifeguard or someone who knows life saving techniques is present and knows that you have seizures. Use a lifejacket for watercraft activities. See our information sheet on *Sports and Recreation* for more safety tips as well as a listing of adapted sports and recreational programs in BC.

### **At Work**

Most people with epilepsy can work without worrying about safety issues. Some duties can often be made safer with a few changes. Employers are, in many cases, required by law to make such changes or accommodations. How you are affected by your seizures and your workplace setting will determine what safety considerations you may need. Review potential workplace hazards and which tasks are difficult as a result of the seizures and/or could trigger them. This can involve working amongst heights, heavy machinery, or graveyard shifts. As per workplace regulations, wear protective clothing and gear, such as gloves, safety glasses, boots, etc. when necessary. The Worker's Compensation Board of BC, and BC and Canadian Human Rights Codes, state that an employer must make a reasonable effort to accommodate a person with disabilities for a job they have the skill and aptitude to do, unless it causes "undue hardship" (e.g. safety, cost). In the BC Human Rights Code, epilepsy is listed as a condition, which is protected under this designation. For their part, employees must make accommodation needs known and be involved in determining what adjustments may be necessary. Detailed information about workplace safety and accommodations is available from our Information Sheet, *Epilepsy and Employment – Accommodations*.

### **Caring for Children**

Like all parents and caregivers, childproof your home as much as possible. Other considerations, could be feeding a child on the floor or putting a young child in a stroller or toddler seat. You could move a baby in a stroller around the house if you think it is necessary. Dress, change, and sponge bathe a baby on the floor, using a changing pad. Use safety gates near stairs. Do not bathe a baby when you are alone. Tell children what to do during a seizure and when and how to call for help.

### **Other Considerations**

Luckily, many people with epilepsy are able to live active lives, and require few to no restrictions on their lifestyle. It is important to focus on all the things that you are capable of doing. If there may be limitations strategize and think creatively to participate in activities that are important to you. Do not hesitate to ask friends and family for help. Community associations may also have volunteers that can assist you with tasks. Everyone needs some extra help during their lifetime and by making your needs known, you can help improve your quality of life.

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**You can join the BC Epilepsy Society as a member and receive all the program and service benefits.**

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