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 are 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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