



Special Concerns about Epilepsy for Teenage Girls

The nurse who helps me with my epilepsy medication told me recently I was “going into puberty” and might “outgrow my dose.” What does that mean?

Puberty is a time when you physically change from a child into an adult. You get taller and weigh more, and develop breasts and body hair. Some of the physical changes may occur quickly and the dose of seizure medicine that worked before may need to be increased because of your new body size.

I’ve had “petit mal” seizures since I was in first grade. My doctor said I would probably outgrow them when I was a teenager. Is that true?

There are kinds of seizures that are almost always outgrown in teenage years. Benign Rolandic epilepsy is an example. About 75% or more of individuals with absence seizures in childhood absence epilepsy outgrow the tendency to have seizures but in about 25% of patients, seizures may recur in teenage years or as young adults. Your doctor will discuss with you and your parents when it is safe to stop your medication. In some patients, seizures may come back after discontinuing medication and it may be necessary to go back on medication. It's important to remember that most people with epilepsy can lead normal, fulfilling lives even if they do continue to take medication for seizures.

My friend takes a different medication for seizures. Which is the best one?

There are many good medications for seizures, and some work for one type of seizure better than they do for other types of seizures. Your doctor chooses your medication by your type of seizures, the pattern of the EEG, how well the medication works for you and if you experience any side effects from the medication. The objective is to use the lowest dose of medication that controls your seizures without side effects. We all react to medications differently and it may be necessary to change to a different medication if your seizures are not controlled or if you have side effects.

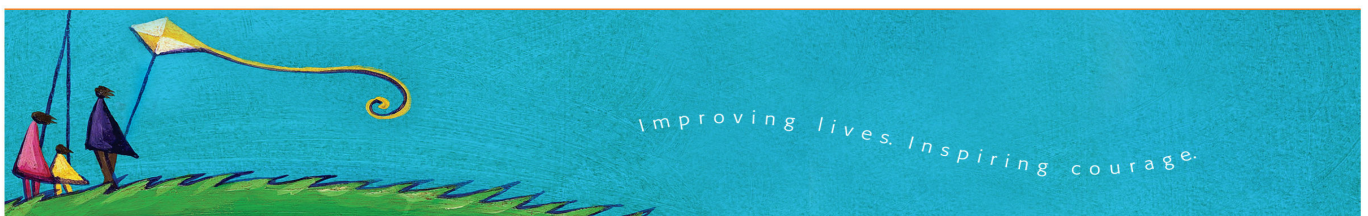
I’ve started having periods and I have heard this will make my seizures worse. Is that true?

There's no way to tell if your seizures will change when you start your menstrual cycle. For most young women, there is no change in seizure pattern. However, some girls and women have more seizures just before or at the beginning of their periods. Although we don't completely understand the cause, it seems related to hormonal changes. If you notice that your seizures seem worse around the time of your periods, talk to your doctor. It is necessary to keep a diary for several months where you record the time of your period and the dates when you have seizures.

For more information on seizures related to menstruation, contact the BC Epilepsy Society for the information sheet like this one on Hormones and Epilepsy.

I am scared my friends will find out about my seizures and will make fun of me. What should I do?

It is your decision whether you tell people about your epilepsy, but it is sometimes hard to keep secrets from your best friends or people with whom you spend a lot of time. Many teens find their friends supportive and understanding when they do decide to share this information. It may help to talk this over with your parents or



I have a boyfriend. What if I have a seizure when we are together?

It is normal for you to worry about this. He may be one of the people you tell about your seizure disorder, so there won't be any unexpected surprises. People of all ages are more afraid of situations they don't understand or anticipate. If your boyfriend knows what to expect, he will be able to help and support you if a seizure does occur. Perhaps one of your parents, or a nurse or a doctor can help you explain the facts about your seizures to special friends.

My parents worry about me and won't let me do stuff with my friends. How can I get them to let me be more independent?

Parents tend to worry a lot about children who have epilepsy and other chronic health concerns due to the fact that they care and love you. It may be helpful to have your nurse or doctor talk to them about reasonable activities. You might have to take some extra precautions. Think through the activities you want to do, and be sure you would not be injured if you had a seizure. For example, you should not participate in water sports without good supervision, and someone who knows about your seizures should ride the chairlift with you if you ski. Practice your negotiating skills to find a plan that is comfortable for both you and your parents.

My parents always lecture me about drinking and doing drugs. Everybody else does it. Why can't I?

Drinking alcohol when you are underage or using illegal drugs at any age is not good for anyone. If you have epilepsy, alcohol and drugs may increase the risk of you having seizures. Or they may cause you to have side effects from your medication. It's your decision to make, but weigh the odds against doing these things just because everyone else does. You need to be more careful about your lifestyle than your friends.

Can I get a driver's license if I have seizures?

In BC generally if a person with epilepsy has been seizure free for six months, is taking their medication as prescribed, and their doctor is confident that the person is conscientious and reliable, they are usually able to get a private drivers license (Class 5-8). However, driving restrictions are different for those for those who have alcohol withdrawal seizures or simple partial seizures, during medication changes, or for people who only have seizures during sleep or upon waking up.

My boyfriend and I are really in love. Can we get married if I have epilepsy?

Yes. Most people with seizures fall in love and marry just like anyone else. If you are serious about your relationship there are important issues for all young couples to consider. You need to understand the facts about your bodies and sexuality. Get information about sexually transmitted diseases, and if you are sexually active make sure you understand birth control options and safe sex.

Will I be able to have children?

Yes. Women with epilepsy get pregnant and most have normal, healthy babies. There are concerns related to seizure control, certain medications and a specific vitamin supplement called folic acid that are important to discuss with your doctor before you get pregnant. Having children is an important decision for any couple, and it requires planning and commitment. It may be necessary to adjust or change your medication and it is important to plan a pregnancy and discuss your medication with your neurologist. There is no reason you can't be a successful parent.

I hate my seizures and having to take medication. Sometimes I go to my room and just explode.

Everyone with epilepsy feels angry and sad at times. Those feelings are normal. If you start to feel hopeless or overwhelmed, talk to your parents or some adult you trust, and get some help. Some people may need counseling to talk about their feelings, and learn ways to deal with stress. Don't ever be ashamed to ask for help. You're worth it.

More information about sexual and reproductive health issues for teen girls is available at www.girlswithnerve.com

Adapted with permission from the Epilepsy Foundation. Approved for circulation in 2009. (lh)

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

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