



## Your Health Care Team

Epilepsy is a condition that may affect a person's life in many ways. In order to deal with these symptoms and effects, and get the best possible information and resources, it is important to consider all of the potential sources of support around you. Members of your health care team may range from professional experts to peers and family members, so it's important to look around and think about how best to make use of these people, with you as the head of your team.

### Neurologists

A neurologist is a specialist in disorders of the nervous system and is trained to investigate, or diagnose and treat, neurological conditions. Pediatric neurologists treat neurological disorders in children. Neurologists often specialize in different fields or conditions, such as neuromuscular disorders, stroke, multiple sclerosis, or epilepsy. You may see a neurologist regularly, once or twice a year to review treatment, or you may only need to meet with him or her initially to learn about your condition. After that, your regular care may come from a general practitioner. General practitioners make referrals to neurologists. Neurologists tend to have practices in major centres and hospitals, and you may need to travel to meet with them.

### General Practitioners

General practitioners or family doctors are often the primary medical professionals who manage your care, and are available to monitor your progress. They often renew prescriptions, respond to immediate concerns, and form long term relationships with patients. They are also able to make referrals to specialists who may give input and answer other questions. If you have trouble finding a general practitioner who is accepting patients, you may visit a walk-in clinic, or go to the College of Physicians & Surgeons of British Columbia website at: [www.cpsbc.ca](http://www.cpsbc.ca)

### Nurses

You may have access to a nurse through a doctor's office, a school, or another health care source. Nurses are often available to provide practical advice and teaching, and to liaise between you and your doctor. Nurses can provide valuable care to prevent problems before they arise, help form day to day health and safety plans, and encourage self-sufficiency.

### Pharmacists

Besides filling prescriptions, pharmacists are valuable sources of information about medications. They will often take the time to be sure that you understand your medication schedule, and that you are familiar with possible side effects. They are also available to answer questions about other medications and potential interactions, such as painkillers, cold treatments, and other prescriptions.

### Mental Health Professionals

A psychologist or counsellor may act as a one-time contact to diagnose a condition, give input, or you may have regular meetings to monitor progress. A psychologist is trained to assess and diagnose problems in thinking, feeling and behaviour as well as to help people overcome or manage these problems. They often have a doctoral degree so can use the title "Dr." A neuropsychologist is a licensed psychologist with expertise in how behaviour and skills are related to brain structures and systems. A counsellor may specialize in different areas of practice such as



relationship issues, depression, vocational consulting, substance abuse, or parenting, and use different therapeutic approaches. A registered clinical counsellor (RCC) has successfully fulfilled requirements of education, supervision and clinical experience to the BC Association of Clinical Counselors.

Some third party payment plans such as extended health care insurance and employee or family assistance programs pay partial or total coverage for counselling services. To find a psychologist, counselor, or another professional therapist, an online directory is available from Counselling BC at: [www.counsellingbc.com](http://www.counsellingbc.com)

### **Social Workers**

A social worker's tasks include both practical assistance as well as emotional support to help people with epilepsy and their families cope with everyday life and seek solutions to problems. Social workers may offer referrals to community services, educational materials, information on legal and financial issues, and help with setting short term and long-range goals and making plans that will meet future care needs. Social workers may be accessed through government agencies, or through non-profit societies.

### **Lawyers**

A lawyer can be a valuable part of your health care team. Lawyers can help you prepare crucial legal documents, such as powers of attorney and enhanced representation agreements, which will enable people you trust to make decisions for you when you are not able. Lawyers who understand the disability assistance legislation can also help you and your family plan so that inheritances will not affect your ability to continue receiving government assistance. They could also assist in access and accommodation relating to employment, housing, services and facilities customarily available to the public, as well as other rights as determined by the BC Human Rights Code.

### **Community Support Workers**

Community support workers assist children and adults in a wide variety of community settings, including community living agencies, respite care, supported employment, residential support, and leisure and day programs.

### **Peer Support Workers**

You may form a relationship with a peer support worker from a community centre, support group, church, or other source. Such support workers could listen and empathize with those who want to vent concerns and fears, give support through emotional or physical crisis, assist in making decisions, and act as advocates. They may also help a person recognize and celebrate the deeper worth of their life, and encourage people to discover personal strengths. Some people with epilepsy who have been through difficult situations may find that they are able to use their experiences to offer support to others in similar situations.

### **Family and Friends**

Your family members and friends are the ones who see you the most, know you the best, and are most likely to support you through a seizure. It is important that they are aware of seizure first aid, and they may wish to carry first aid cards from the BC Epilepsy Society. They may be able to help you keep track of the frequency of your seizures, as well as what they look like, and what sort of events may act as triggers. They can accompany you to doctor's appointments to share this knowledge, and help you understand and record the information you gain. Besides this practical assistance, the people who care about you offer emotional support, share your experiences, and see you as much more than a person with epilepsy.

### **Additional Supports**

Depending on your needs and lifestyle, other specialists such as occupational therapists, neurosurgeons, pediatricians, dietitians, physiotherapists, early childhood educators, and special education assistants may also provide valuable supports. As the head of your own health care team, it is your job to be creative and proactive, and make the best use of the resources around you.

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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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