



Sports and Recreation for People Living with Epilepsy

An active physical and social life benefits everyone's health. This is also true for people living with epilepsy. In fact, physical activity could also help reduce the occurrence of seizures in some people.

Epilepsy affects each person differently. Therefore, planning and participating in sports and recreation activities needs to be individualized. Some aspects to consider include: the seizure type and frequency of the seizures, any treatment side effects, the individual's ability to follow instructions and act responsibly, and the nature and supervision of the activity.

Common sense needs to be used in making these decisions. Making safety the exclusive concern may unnecessarily limit activities. Restriction and isolation can foster low self-esteem and emphasize the negative impacts of epilepsy. The goals should be both safety and a lifestyle that is as normal as possible. Listed below are some activities that may require safety precautions:

Swimming and water sports: Water can be a hazard for anyone, and especially for people with epilepsy. Review your seizure control with your doctor to see whether water sports of any kind are appropriate at this point in your treatment. If you have uncontrolled seizures, you should not swim unless a lifeguard or someone who knows life saving techniques is present. Use a lifejacket for all watercraft activities and for swimming in oceans, rivers, and lakes.

Bicycling: Everyone who rides a bike should wear a helmet. When seizures pose a danger, bikes should be ridden in areas without motor vehicles and preferably on a soft surface.

Mountain climbing: Heights are a potential hazard to anyone who has epilepsy. There is the risk of falling during a seizure, and the reduced oxygen and atmospheric changes at some elevations may increase seizure risk. Before participating, consider the safety precautions, and any risks to your own wellbeing and other members of the party.

Contact sports: If you want to participate in contact sports like tackle football, ice hockey, or rugby you need to consider the risks of head injury. If playing contact sports is important in your life, discuss accommodation strategies with your doctor and coach. Two great examples of people with epilepsy pursuing contact sports are Alan Fanerca, the four-time All Pro starting offensive lineman for the 2006 Super Bowl champion Pittsburgh Steelers, and Chanda Gunn, the starting goalie for the 2006 USA women's Olympic hockey team.

Other activities: Safety restrictions apply to sky diving, water skiing, hang gliding, scuba diving and any activity that would be hazardous if one suddenly loses consciousness or was unable to control their movements. Participation in these activities should be avoided or decided in consultation with your doctor. Gym and exercise equipment is generally safe. However, if you have uncontrolled seizures you may wish to use the buddy system with certain equipment. Do not continue exercising if you feel faint, nauseous or dehydrated. Always wear protective safety equipment during applicable act.



There are many sports and recreational activities designed for people with special needs. Here are some of the possibilities available in BC:

Overnight Camps:

- **BC Easter Seals Camps 604-873-1865 www.eastersealscamps.ca:** These camps provide sessions for children 6 to 18 years of age who have a cognitive and/or physical disability. Camps are located in Winfield, Shawnigan and Squamish. The BC Epilepsy Society provides camp subsidies for individuals who require it.
- **Eureka Outdoor Camp 604-520-1155 www.eurekacamp.ca:** This camp is for children ages 8-18 with invisible disabilities (such as learning disabilities, ADHD, or epilepsy). The program supports the development of social skills, self awareness, and independence in an outdoor setting. It is located in North Vancouver and Princeton. The BC Epilepsy Society provides camp subsidies for individuals who require it.
- **Zajac Ranch 604-462-8305/604-739-0444 www.zajacranch.com:** A summer camp outside of Mission, with programs especially designed for children with chronic health conditions or disabilities. An on-site medical centre provides 24 hour care to campers. The BC Epilepsy Society provides camp subsidies for individuals who require it.
- **Camp Alexandra 604-535-0015 www.alexhouse.net/camping:** Offers a supported camp for adults with developmental and mental health disabilities in the Okanagan.

Additional Opportunities:

- **Pacific Riding for Developing Abilities (PRDA) 604-530-8717 www.prda.ca:** Offers therapeutic horseback riding for adults and children with physical, cognitive or emotional disabilities. PRDA have three different chapters in the Lower Mainland. Individual organizations also offer this service in different regions throughout the province.
- **Sirota's Alchymy – Martial Arts Centre 604-244-8842 www.sirotasalchymy.com:** Offers martial arts programs for people with special needs and disabilities. Classes are for adults and children. These are currently available in Richmond and Vancouver.
- **Power to Be Adaptive Recreation 250-385-2363/604-971-5052 www.powertobe.ca:** Provides access to physical activities such as sea kayaking, alpine skiing, indoor rock climbing, gardening and camping for young people living with a disability. Currently operates in Victoria and Vancouver.
- **BC Special Olympics 604-737-3078/1-888-854-2276 www.specialolympics.bc.ca:** Provides high quality sports programs and competitions to meet the needs and interests of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Year-round programs in 18 different sports are available in 54 communities across BC.
- **BC Adaptive Snowsports 604-333-3630 <https://www.bcadaptive.com/>:** Provides learn-to-ski programs for all ages with a variety of disabilities in Alpine, Nordic and Snowboarding disciplines. Services available at mountains throughout the province.
- **Fishing Forever 604-882-9988 /1-888-881-2293 www.bcwf.bc.ca:** This BC Wildlife Federation program provides supervised fishing activities for individuals with special needs
- **BC Recreation and Parks Association 604-629-0965/1-866-929-0965 www.bcrpa.bc.ca:** Offers resources on inclusion and integration to create an environment that values and promotes full participation by all individuals.

Contact your local community centre, parks board or community living society for information on other sports and recreational programs that may be applicable for you or other family members.

Revised in February 2016 (mc)

You can join the BC Epilepsy Society as a member and receive all program and service benefits
PO Box 30521, Burnaby RPO Madison, BC V5C 6J5
604-875-6704 | www.bcepilepsy.com | deirdre@bcepilepsy.com or sonia@bcepilepsy.com