BC Epilepsy Society

Epilepsy and Employment - Disclosure

How you choose to handle telling your employer that you have epilepsy, depends on how your epilepsy, or any other medical conditions and/or disabilities, may affect you. As well, it also involves the required job duties, workplace environment, if accommodations will be required, and other aspects of the situation.

The decision is ultimately made by the individual, and there is no one way to handle deciding whether or not to disclose.

Should I disclose my epilepsy to my employer?
Duringthe jobsearch andhiringprocess you have nolegal obligation to disclose your epilepsy to an employer if you do not require workplace accommodations, or if your disability does not affect your occupational health and safety.

According to the Canadian Charter of Rights an employer cannot deny you an interview, or refuse to hire you, or fire you because you have a disability - so long as your disability does not adversely affect your performance.

However, if you are not qualified for the job, and you cannot effectively and safely perform your duties then the employer has no obligation to hire you.

Some employers have implemented initiatives for hiring persons with disabilities. In these cases, it is preferable to disclose disabilities in a cover letter or résumé.

Before you decide whether or not you will tell your employer about your epilepsy, consider how it affects you. Because seizures can differ in type and frequency, an ideal work place for one person may not be suitable for someone else.

Take into account factors such as:

- Date of the last seizure
- Frequency of seizures
- Seizure types(s)
- Potential seizure triggers
- Assistance required during and after a seizure
- Medication side-effects, and/or other medical conditions or disabilities that could affect workplace abilities
- Potential safety concerns for yourself and/or others
- Accommodations required to perform the job

How should I tell?
Your tone and presentation will influence how your employer hears you. Sounding apologetic, hesitant, or fearful when disclosing may alarm your employer and make your epilepsy seem like a bigger problem.

On the other hand, if you sound and appear confident, this will inspire confidence in you and reassure your employer that difficulties can be surmounted.

If you are comfortable discussing your epilepsy, it will make the employer more at ease and will bridge understanding.

Be prepared to address any concerns employers may express, even if they are not expressed directly. Anticipate the employer's reaction and possible questions.

Role-play your disclosure with a supportive friend or family member. Have a list of resources that you and your employer can refer to for more information. Contact the BC Epilepsy Society for materials to assist you and your employer.

Be prepared to explain issues pertaining to your employment (e.g. safety, any accommodations needed), but focus on how you are qualified for the position and how you can be an asset to the company.

When should I tell?

Application:

Should you choose to disclose on your application form, your employer may commend you on your honesty, yet they may quickly disqualify you without reviewing your qualifications. People who use this technique often find more difficulty in applying for a job, but typically have less work-related problems regarding their epilepsy when they are hired.

There may be some specific considerations to your choice of a job. You should aim your job applications to positions unlikely to be affected by your epilepsy. Some examples of situations to avoid would be working around water, or an expectation of a professional drivers license. If your epilepsy is prominently affected by sleeping patterns, shift work might be avoided.

Interview:

The advantage of disclosing your epilepsy during the interview allows you to address any of your employer's concerns and bring to their attention any work accommodations you may require. Furthermore, due to your presence, you will less likely encounter discrimination. Before you decide to go ahead with this timing, ask yourself "How comfortable am I talking about your epilepsy?" During your interview, it is important focus on your skills and what you can bring to the company, not how epilepsy affects your abilities.

If an employer asks, "Do you have any health concerns that will impact your ability to do the job?" it would be wise to disclose if you have some doubts about your level of functioning due to your condition.

Before Your First Shift:

Disclosing after your interview but before your first shift is another option. However, your employer may feel that your epilepsy should have been brought forth before you were hired and reflect upon you negatively. Be sure you are prepared to explain why your epilepsy will not affect your work performance and how you can ensure work safety. If your employer changes his hiring decision, and you are confident your seizures do not hamper your ability to work, you may choose to take legal action.

After You Start:

Some people may wait until after they start work to let their employer know about their seizures. This gives them the opportunity to prove themselves to their boss and co-workers. However, the longer you wait, the harder it may become to disclose. Once your epilepsy is revealed, your employer may accuse you of withholding important information and/or falsifying your application – making it difficult to regain their trust. Of greater concern is the possibility of having a seizure on the job. Because no one will know about your condition, incorrect first aid may be given and harm could be done to yourself.

What if I've been seizure free?

If you have been seizure-free for over two years it may be less critical to disclose your epilepsy to your employer. Nevertheless, if someone discovers you have epilepsy, you might face some negative consequences (e.g. loss of trust from staff, wrong first aid administered).

If you've had little or no success in disclosure situations, or feel uncomfortable, you may want to explore your options with an employment counselor or program that works with people with disabilities. Information about these employment programs are contained in other Information Sheets from the BC Epilepsy Society.

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