

This leaflet provides suggestions and tips for planning safe journeys whether they be to places of work, school or college, to attend appointments, visit friends, pursue leisure activities or go on holiday. It will be useful to people with epilepsy, family members and carers.

To assess the safety and viability of what you are hoping to do and to enable your travel to be as stress free and enjoyable as possible it may be helpful to consider the following questions in relation to your epilepsy and in particular to the type, frequency and severity of your seizures, and make your plans accordingly.

- what is the reason for your journey?
- are you travelling alone or accompanied?
- what is your age and current state of health?
- where are you going?
- how long will your journey take?
- what transport will you be using on your journey?
- do you have additional health problems?
- will you need medication en route?
- might you need medic-alert jewellery, seizure card, emergency contact number?
- what facilities will be available at your destination?
- do you know the cost of fares and what concessions are available?
- do you know where to get tickets and bus and train passes?

Whether your journey is a short, daily one or a longer trip overseas it is advisable for safety and security reasons to:

- tell someone where you are going
- provide them with contact name and number
- tell them the time and date of your return
- take sufficient medication to last the length of your trip
- have a watch and a mobile phone with you
- consider whether a personal alarm would be useful—for evenings/night time
- have sufficient money for the trip and the unexpected
- be prepared for changing weather conditions
- check that you have all the relevant tickets/information/documents with you
- avoid alcohol
- eat regularly.

SOME USEFUL TIPS IF -

Walking:

- wear appropriate footwear
- take rain gear with you
- avoid busy roads if possible
- take sunglasses if you have photosensitive epilepsy
- take a hat if weather is hot/sunny
- use pedestrian crossings.

Cycling:

- ensure your bike is roadworthy
- make sure your lights are working
- wear a safety helmet and high visibility clothing
- keep to cycle tracks and quiet roads where possible. See 'Rules for Cyclists' and 'You and Your Bicycle' at www.direct.gov.uk/TravelAndTransport

Driving:

- ensure you comply with the UK Driver & Vehicle Licensing Agency's (DVLA) licensing laws and regulations in relation to epilepsy. See www.dft.gov.uk/dvla for more information
- make sure your driving licence, car insurance, road tax, MOT, breakdown cover are all up-to-date
- different countries have different driving laws relating to people with epilepsy so check your eligibility if you wish to drive abroad. See www.dft.gov.uk/dvla

The Blue Badge Scheme is a European Union wide scheme which provides national arrangements of parking concessions. It is for people with severe walking difficulties, upper limb disabilities or who are registered blind and who travel either as a driver or as a passenger in a private vehicle. To apply for a badge go to the social work department of your local council who operate the scheme. Leaflets giving details of the scheme are available from The Scottish Executive (see back page for contact details) and from Epilepsy Connections. See leaflet 11 'Epilepsy and Driving'.

Using a motorised wheelchair:

- no licence is required
- observe safety rules relating to riding on pavements/roads/crossings.

Travelling as a passenger

By car/taxis:

- sit in the back of the taxi
- if you feel unwell tell the taxi driver and advise him what to do.

By bus/coach:

- use seat belts wherever provided
- let another passenger know if you start to feel unwell
- try to sit in a seat where you feel safe.

Concessionary bus travel

Scottish residents over the age of 60 and in possession of a concession card travel free on public buses in Scotland but not in the rest of the U.K. Children under the age of 5 travel free throughout the U.K. People with a disability, including active epilepsy, can apply for **free** concessionary bus travel for themselves and a companion. Proof of eligibility is required. (Contact Epilepsy Connections for more information).

By train:

- should you start to feel unwell let someone know so they can call for assistance.

Concessionary rail travel

People over 60 and people with disabilities can buy a rail card, which reduces the cost of fares on **all** rail routes and on some boats and ferries. Further information and application forms can be obtained at staffed main line stations.

By plane:

- flights can reduce travel time but they can also be stressful:
 - struggling with luggage
 - long queues for check-in, security, passport control
 - delayed flights
 - making connecting flights.
- long haul flights can add to stress and can provoke seizures by
 - disturbing sleep/lack of sleep
 - days being longer (flights travelling eastwards)
 - days being shorter (flights travelling westwards)
 - (travelling north to south or vice versa doesn't seem to pose the same problems)
- crossing time zones can pose problems of when to take medication (seek advice from your doctor before commencing the journey)
- having unusual/erratic mealtimes
- dry, stuffy atmosphere in the cabin—drink plenty of still water and avoid alcohol
- jet lag on arrival.

TRAVELLING ABROAD:

Passports

It is strongly advised to have your passport valid for at least 6 months prior to its expiry date to cover your journey. If renewal is necessary allow plenty of time for processing particularly at busy holiday periods. If you hold a European Union passport and wish to travel to countries outside the European Union you may require appropriate visas.

Ensure you have written in the back of your passport your next of kin, emergency contact number and numbers to call in case you lose your credit cards. It's also a good idea to make copies of your passport. Leave one copy at home and carry one with you, but keep it separate from your passport.

You may find it useful to visit www.DoctorBabel.com, an online medical records service which stores your medical records, including information about your medication, and can translate them into a number of languages which you can print off and carry with you. There are two levels of service, one free and one costing £20 depending on the level of detail you require.

Food and Drink

For your comfort and safety during your journey, make sure you have enough to eat and drink.

Stay hydrated

Air travel in particular can cause dehydration, which may be a seizure trigger for some people. When you are dehydrated, your attention and concentration can decrease by 13% and short term memory by 7%. No matter how you are travelling, drink 6-8 glasses of water a day to stay on top form during your journey.

Don't go hungry

Hunger can cause blood sugar levels to fall which may in turn trigger seizures. Make sure you eat regularly; if travelling by car take plenty of breaks and plan ahead for rail and air journeys.

Avoid alcohol

It is safest to avoid alcohol when travelling particularly on long journeys and when flying. Alcohol can lead to dehydration and interferes with the absorption of antiepileptic medication, which in turn can cause seizures not whilst drinking but afterwards. Alcohol may pose the additional risk of status epilepticus occurring.

Medication

If you are flying, try to carry all of your medication in your hand luggage in case your checked-in luggage is delayed or lost. You may be asked to provide evidence that the medication you are carrying has been prescribed for you so carry a copy of your prescription.

Check airline and airport security rules before you travel as these can change at short notice. Currently you are allowed to carry solid medicines (tablets, capsules) in your hand luggage. You may also carry liquid medicines (syrups) in bottles of up to 100ml. If you need to carry more than 100ml of liquid medicine to ensure you have enough for the flight you must get permission from the airline and the airport in advance. All medicines, along with toiletries, should be in a clear, sealed plastic bag before you go through any security checks. You should also take a letter from your GP or epilepsy specialist confirming you need this amount of medication.

For short trips, take as much medication as you will need plus extra doses in case of gastric upsets. For information on what to do if you have vomiting or diarrhoea, see Leaflet 9, "Frequently Asked Questions on Antiepileptic Drugs (AEDs)".

It is not advisable to travel with large supplies of medication:

- you may experience problems passing through customs
- heat and humidity might reduce the effectiveness of the medication.

If you are going on a long trip find out well in advance if your AEDs will be available in the country or countries you intend to visit. Older AEDs are normally available in Western Europe, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. Newer AEDs may only be licensed for sale in a small number of other countries. Be aware that your AED may be known under a different name outside the UK. Your GP, pharmacist or Epilepsy Connections will be able to advise you about the availability of your particular medication and how to get it while you are travelling.

The European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)

The European Health Insurance Card (**EHIC**) allows travellers to any country within the European Economic Area to receive reduced-cost or free urgent medical treatment in the event of illness or accident. The EHIC is free to UK residents. Call 0845 606 2030 or visit your local Post Office for an application form. Remember that the EHIC may not cover all the treatment you would expect to get in the UK and is not a substitute for adequate travel insurance.

Travel Insurance

You are strongly advised to buy adequate travel insurance. When seeking and comparing quotes, you must provide information about any pre-existing medical conditions and treatment as failure to do so might invalidate any future claims. Epilepsy qualifies as a pre-existing condition. Shop around and read the policy carefully before buying to ensure that you will be adequately covered.

Vaccinations and immunisations

Find out about any necessary or recommended medical precautions required for the country you plan to visit well ahead of your trip to ensure that any vaccinations, immunisations or preventive (prophylactic) medications have time to take effect before you leave.

Contact your GP or pharmacist, call the Travellers Healthline Advisory Service on 09061 33 77 33 or visit the Medical Advisory Service for Travellers Abroad at www.masta.org for general health advice for travellers and specific information about vaccinations and immunisations.

NHS Scotland's website www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk provides travel health information for people travelling outside the UK

Malaria

All travellers to areas where there is a risk of malaria must take careful precautions. This is particularly important for those people with epilepsy or a history of epilepsy. A number of prescription-only and over-the-counter antimalarial drugs are suitable for people with epilepsy. However mefloquine (Lariam) and chloroquine (Avloclor and Nivaquine) should be avoided as they can cause seizures. The choice of antimalarial drug and dosage depends on the area to which you are travelling and the AEDs you are taking. The Hospital for Tropical Diseases in London recommends that GPs seek advice from the Malaria Reference Centre before recommending a particular antimalarial drug to people with epilepsy or a history of epilepsy.

As antimalarial drugs are not 100% effective, additional precautions should be taken to avoid mosquito bites:

- wear long-sleeved clothing and trousers when outside after sunset
- use insect repellents on exposed skin
- sleep under a mosquito net.

Status epilepticus

In the case of tonic clonic seizures, the following situations require medical attention. **Status epilepticus is a medical emergency requiring urgent treatment.**

Prolonged seizures: seizures lasting over 5 minutes or 2 minutes longer than usual.

Serial seizures: seizures occurring one after another without full recovery in between.

Status epilepticus: seizure activity persisting for 30 minutes or more without return to normal breathing or full consciousness.

Prolonged seizures, serial seizures and status epilepticus can occur with **all** types of seizure and require medical attention.

Travel and Holiday Advice for People With Disabilities

Many charitable organisations have or can provide information on holiday schemes supporting people with disabilities and medical conditions:

Contact a Family

Tel: 0808.808.3555 E-mail: helpline@cafamily.org.uk

Disabled Holiday Directory

Tel: 0800.953.7070 Web: <http://www.accessibleguide.co.uk>

Door to Door

Web: <http://www.dptac.gov.uk/door-to-door/03/01.htm>

Fabb Scotland

Tel: 0131.475.2313 Web: www.fabb.org.uk

Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR)

Tel: 020.7250.3222 E-Mail: radar@radar.org.uk

The Blue Badge Scheme

Scottish Executive Development Department, Transport Division 2, 2-E Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ. Tel: 0131.244.0860

Tourism For All UK

Tel: 0845.124.9971 E-mail: info@tourismforall.org.uk

Traveline

Tel: 0871.200.22.33 Web: www.traveline.com

Diisability Now

www.disabilitynow.org.uk/living/travel

Vitalise

www.vitalise.org.uk

To find out about epilepsy organisations worldwide, contact the:

International Bureau for Epilepsy

E-mail: ibedublin@eircom.net

This is one of a series of information leaflets available to download from our website for personal use only, subject to the Terms and Conditions for use of our site, which are shown on our Home Page.



Supporting people with epilepsy

Epilepsy Connections

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