

## 5 Treatment for epilepsy

Once a diagnosis of epilepsy has been confirmed, your specialist epilepsy team will recommend a treatment plan based on your medical, social and lifestyle needs.

It is likely that this treatment plan will include the use of antiepileptic drugs (AEDs) which control seizures for most people with epilepsy.

You can find out more about antiepileptic drugs in Leaflet 6 'Antiepileptic Drugs'.

This leaflet describes:

- other medical treatments that may be recommended if AEDs are proving ineffective in controlling your seizures
- steps you can take to improve your wellbeing
  - diet
  - complementary therapies
  - support and counselling.

### Antiepileptic Drugs (AEDs)

AEDs are usually the first choice of treatment for epilepsy. Most people with epilepsy will have their seizures controlled by AEDs. For more information see Leaflet 6 'Antiepileptic Drugs'.

### Other Treatments

These treatments are only likely to be offered if AEDs are not proving effective. They will not be suitable for everyone with epilepsy.

### Surgery

Surgery for epilepsy has been carried out over the last 50 years. It has a good success rate for a small proportion of people with epilepsy. It involves removing or separating areas of the brain where epileptic activity starts.

It may be an option if:

- drugs fail to control seizures
- tests clearly indicate where in the brain epileptic activity starts and removal of this area would not cause unacceptable damage or disability
- there are no other relevant reasons:
  - significant physical/neurological conditions
  - severe psychological/emotional issues
  - other medical conditions.

A full assessment by a specialist team will be carried out before a final decision about surgery is made. This can take up to a year.

## Vagus Nerve Stimulator (VNS)

A VNS is a small device surgically implanted near the left collar bone in an hour-long operation. The VNS is attached to the vagus nerve and is programmed to send electrical messages to the brain to reduce the frequency and duration of seizures.

VNS may be an option if:

- AEDs have failed to control seizures
- surgery is not an option.

The treatment is rare and most people will continue to need AEDs in addition to the VNS implant.

## Ketogenic Diet

The Ketogenic Diet is a carefully controlled diet based on high fat, low carbohydrate and restricted fluid intake. It is a medical treatment prescribed by an epilepsy specialist and monitored by a dietician. It should only be used under medical supervision.

It is most often recommended for children whose seizures do not respond well to AEDs. However, the Ketogenic Diet is the subject of on-going research and recent studies have reported some success with adults and also with infants prior to using AEDs.

Further information is available at [www.epilepsyresearch.org.uk](http://www.epilepsyresearch.org.uk)  
[www.matthewsfriends.org](http://www.matthewsfriends.org)

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## Diet

- Eat regular healthy meals with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables
- Avoid processed foods and drinks high in additives
- Drink no more than 1-2 units of alcohol a day as the risk of seizure increases with alcohol consumption.

Seek your doctor's advice:

- If you are thinking about taking vitamin and mineral supplements
- about folic acid supplements if you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant
- if you know or think you are allergic to certain foods as allergies can occasionally trigger seizures.

## Complementary Therapies

The most useful complementary therapies for people with epilepsy are likely to be those that aid relaxation and reduce stress.

However, some therapies may not be suitable, e.g. some aromatherapy oils and herbal remedies may provoke seizures.

Before you try a complementary therapy always:

- seek your doctor's advice
- use a qualified therapist registered with a national governing body
- make sure s/he knows about epilepsy
- discuss your epilepsy before starting any therapy.

## Support and Counselling

Support and counselling are vital to any treatment programme.

**Epilepsy Connections can :**

- provide information about epilepsy, seizures and treatment
- assist people to come to terms with a diagnosis of epilepsy
- enable people to ask questions especially about their fears and anxieties
- suggest ways of managing epilepsy and seizures
- support families, friends and carers
- provide epilepsy education
- offer a befriending service
- assist with employment opportunities
- assist with the problems that having epilepsy may cause in schools.

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Supporting people with epilepsy

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