

7b Epilepsy: Safety in School, College and University

Each person's experience of having epilepsy is different, so it is really important that whatever school, college or university you are attending that your own and others' safety needs are considered and assessed in relation to your own epilepsy.

STEPS TO SAFER LEARNING

The first step is to talk about your epilepsy, and in particular the kind of seizures you have, with the relevant person. This might be the special needs advisor, guidance staff member, student advisor, or an Epilepsy Connections field worker. With them you can assess your safety needs (e.g. access to a lift rather than stairs, if required, somewhere to lie down and recover should a seizure occur). Such discussion will enable ways to ensure your own safety, and the safety of fellow students and staff in whatever class, lecture, educational programme, activity you participate.

In this context, it is also important for the relevant staff member to have from your doctor or consultant regularly updated records of:

- your seizure pattern
- treatment
- any emergency care plans that may be required.

You will find a useful Epilepsy Checklist at the end of this leaflet, which you could complete and give to the appropriate member of staff.

The next step should involve you, (your parent or carer if appropriate), staff member, school nursing service, an Epilepsy Connections field worker and possibly your GP in doing a risk assessment on the overall environment including:

- stairs
- movement around inside and outside the building
- laboratories
- domestic science rooms
- technical drawing/woodwork/metalwork rooms
- toilet and shower facilities
- gyms
- travel to and from educational establishments.

There are very few educational activities in which you cannot be involved, provided precautions relating to the above are put in place and the guidelines indicated below are followed.

Computers

Computers are an integral part of many educational programmes. Computer screens are generally safe for people with epilepsy but may be a factor in triggering seizures in some people with photosensitive epilepsy. About 5% of people with epilepsy are photosensitive (i.e. their seizures can be triggered by flashing or flickering lights or geometric patterns). A few simple precautions can be taken to avoid triggering a seizure if you have been diagnosed with photosensitive epilepsy:

- ensure correct adjustment of chair and computer screen
- possibly make use of a screen protector to minimise glare
- take a break every few minutes from intense concentration on the screen by averting eyes, taking a short walk away from work station
- avoid working with a computer if you are very tired
- if possible use a laptop computer with liquid crystal display as these don't flicker
- move away from the screen if you feel uncomfortable in any way—dizzy, blurred vision, muscles twitching.

See Leaflet 8 'Epilepsy and Photosensitivity' for more information about photosensitivity.

Physical Education and Sports

Physical exercise and activity are essential to promote health and wellbeing for everyone, but if your epilepsy is active it is important to be aware of high risk areas, for example climbing heights in the gym. To minimise risk here, thick cushioning/mats and protective headgear are advised.

Taking part in most team sports and games is positive and healthy, but it is wise to be supervised. Seizures can be triggered during such activities due to excitement and heat, so having somebody around who knows how to respond should a seizure happen is always helpful.

Swimming is also a healthy and recommended activity, but it is important that you have someone with you who knows what to do if you have a seizure, especially if it occurs in the water.

Some high risk sports, e.g. boxing, scuba diving should be avoided. See Leaflet 7d 'Epilepsy: Safety in Sport' for more information about epilepsy and sport.

It is really important that anybody with epilepsy is included in school or field trips, excursions, camps, holidays etc after discussion has taken place about the possible risks involved, and provided that all parties have agreed on the appropriate safety precautions required.

Guidance

If required, Epilepsy Connections' fieldwork staff can provide information in relation to the Education (Additional Support Needs) Act 2004.

Medication

If possible avoid midday doses of medication— it's preferable for medication to be taken at home. If medication has to be taken during the day, provision for its storage needs to be made in accordance with the policies of the relevant school, college or university.

Medication storage and administration will also need to be considered in relation to any trips away from school, college or university.

Emergency Treatment

If on occasions you require emergency treatment for your seizures such as rectal diazepam or midazolam, then it is vital that you advise the relevant person in your school, college, university, so that whoever undertakes the administration and recording of any emergency treatment receives appropriate information and training.

Training

To ensure that your teachers, lecturers, fellow students, bus escorts, canteen staff etc understand what epilepsy is, and how to help if you have a seizure, it is important that they have some understanding of epilepsy and instruction in first aid procedures.

Epilepsy Connections can provide training in epilepsy awareness, first aid for seizures, and the administration of emergency treatments.

Epilepsy Connections also runs a Schools Project, which provides age-appropriate information about epilepsy and delivers fun and interactive talks to pupils. It also provides teachers and staff with information about the wider impact of epilepsy on children and young people affected by the condition.

AN EPILEPSY CHECKLIST

Completing this checklist will enable appropriate staff to have a clear understanding of your epilepsy and what precautions may need to be put in place to ensure your safety.

1. What kinds of seizures do you have?
2. How long do your seizures usually last?
3. How often do your seizures occur?
4. Do you have any warning of a seizure coming on?
YES NO
5. Are you aware of anything that triggers your seizures?
6. How often do you take medication?
7. Will it be necessary to take medication during the hours you are in school/college/university?
YES NO

8. What kind of first aid/assistance may you require when you have a seizure?
9. Do you sometimes need emergency treatment/care following a seizure?
YES NO

If YES, please provide details.

Do you wish anyone to be contacted if you have a seizure? If so, provide details.

10. Do you usually need a rest after a seizure?
YES NO

If YES, for how long?

11. Are you likely to be incontinent during a seizure?
YES NO - Bladder Bowel

12. Do you experience any changes in your behaviour or emotions before or after a seizure? Give details.
13. Do you have other medical conditions? If yes, please provide details.
14. Has anyone—parents/doctor—recommended any limitations on your activities?

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Supporting people with epilepsy

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