

## Epilepsy—Safety at work

### Background Information

Epilepsy is a common neurological condition affecting about 1 person in every 103 in the UK. Epilepsy is a tendency to have recurring seizures. Seizures happen when there is an interruption to the electrical activity of the brain. Seizures can take many forms and can affect body movements, thinking, memory, emotional and behavioural responses.

For further information on seizures and how to deal with them see *Epilepsy—an introduction* and *Epilepsy—First Aid for Seizures*.

The majority of people with epilepsy will have their seizures controlled by medication and many will not require additional support or adjustments within the workplace. However, epilepsy and seizures can have safety implications for an employee and for those working around him/her.

### The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 defines a person with a disability as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Epilepsy is covered by this Act.

Under the Act an employer must not discriminate against a person with a disability in relation to

- recruitment and retention
- promotion and transfers
- training and development
- redundancy and dismissal processes.

Under the terms of the Act employers are required to make reasonable adjustments to support a person with a disability. For an employee with epilepsy these adjustments could be as simple and inexpensive as:-

- being aware of possible seizure triggers, including stress and anxiety (particularly when starting a new job), tiredness, disturbed sleep, and environmental factors, e.g. lighting
- understanding that about 5% of people with epilepsy are photosensitive, where seizures can be triggered by flickering lights or by some geometric patterns. Computer screens operate at a high frequency and are unlikely to trigger seizures. However, it's good practice to encourage frequent breaks away from a screen to prevent fatigue, which can trigger seizures
- providing time off for medical appointments and flexibility while the employee adapts to any new treatment regime
- flexible working hours
- being aware of the possible detrimental impact on a person's epilepsy of changing shift patterns
- being aware that seizures and adverse side effects of antiepileptic drugs (AEDs) may sometimes affect memory, concentration and mood

## Adjustments (cont)

- providing a safe, comfortable recovery area
- encouraging the employee to talk through any problems and make his/her own suggestions on how best to promote health and safety without discrimination or stigma
- being aware of current driving regulations—is driving essential for the post? Could driving duties be re-allocated? Is public transport an option? For details of driving regulations, see our leaflet Epilepsy—Driving
- providing epilepsy awareness training for employees.

## Access to Work

Disability Employment Advisers offer practical advice and help to support people with disabilities to do their job. The Access to Work scheme (available through Jobcentre Plus) can also help with any extra employment costs that result from a person's disability, for example:

- special aids or equipment in the workplace
- adaptation to premises or to existing equipment
- help with work related travel costs for people who are unable to use public transport.

For further information, visit [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

## Disclosing epilepsy

The first steps to protect your health and ensure safety at work involve having a good understanding of your condition and how it affects you, adhering to your treatment plan and making sensible lifestyle choices. However, although it's up to you to decide when and how to tell your employer that you have epilepsy, deciding **not** to tell your employer may have health and safety implications for you and your colleagues.

When deciding what to tell your employer about your epilepsy be open and honest and consider providing them with the following information:

- What kind of seizures you experience.
- How well your seizures are controlled.
- How frequently your seizures occur.
- Whether you get a warning or aura before a seizure.
- How long your seizures last.
- How long is it before you are fully recovered.
- Whether you are aware of seizure triggers—e.g. stress, tiredness, shiftwork, lighting.
- What help you need during and after a seizure.
- What medication you take and when.
- Whether you have other medical conditions.

The Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 requires employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all employees. Under the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999, employers also have responsibility to carry out assessments of risks to employees that arise from their work activities and to make arrangements to implement procedures/ precautions found to be necessary by the risk assessment. For employees with epilepsy, it is important that the nature of their epilepsy is taken into account along with the type of job they do and their working environment.

For further information, visit [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)

## Restricted Occupations

The majority of jobs are open to people with epilepsy. However, some occupations may be restricted by law and others by health and safety considerations. These include:-

- pilot
- armed forces
- firefighter
- ambulance driver
- child minder
- merchant seafarer
- air traffic controller
- train driver
- LGV, PCV or taxi driver (for further details on driving regulations, see our leaflet Epilepsy—Driving)
- coastguard
- prison service.

Statutory restrictions do change and there may be flexibility so it's worth checking current guidelines with prospective employers or trade organisations.

Non-statutory restrictions may apply to other occupations depending on the type of work, degree of seizure control, type of seizures and side effects of antiepileptic drugs (AEDs). Some types of work pose particular hazards to people with poorly controlled seizures. These include working:-

- at heights
- near water
- with high voltage or open circuit electricity
- with unprotected machinery
- on/near moving vehicles
- with chemicals
- near sources of extreme heat or cold
- in isolated places
- alone with babies, children or frail, elderly people.

If you feel you have been discriminated against as a result of having epilepsy you may be entitled to pursue a claim under The Equality Act 2010. Contact Epilepsy Connections or the Citizens Advice Bureau who can advise on your circumstances and may suggest you get in touch with the Equality and Human Rights Commission, ACAS or a lawyer.

Employers and employees can contact Epilepsy Connections to discuss any areas of concern which may have arisen within the workplace.

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

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