

Epilepsy—Safety in the home

The majority of people with epilepsy have their seizures controlled with medication and lead a full and active life. The aim of this leaflet is to identify and minimise risk to enable you to do that.

Safety is a major consideration for everyone but additional safeguards may be needed for people with uncontrollable epilepsy.

Home assessments are available from Epilepsy Connections' Fieldwork Team.

Floors and upholstery

Avoid coarse fabrics to reduce the risk of friction burns. Use non-slip, cushioned floor coverings or carpets and avoid hard flooring such as ceramic tiles. Ensure stair carpet is securely fitted.

Doors and Windows, Stairs and Balconies

Check if toughened safety glass is fitted in windows and doors. If not, consider replacing existing glass or applying safety film. Consider whether balcony railings are high enough. Handrails or grab bars can be useful when balance is affected after seizures.

Fires and Radiators

Provide secure guards to all fires, but avoid open coal and log fires and free standing heaters wherever possible. Radiator guards are advisable, and hot pipes should be covered with insulating material.

Furniture

Choose sturdy furniture with rounded corners or use corner protectors. Avoid overcrowding of furniture and beware of glass-topped tables and breakable ornaments. Where glass in furniture cannot be avoided, ensure safety glass is fitted.

Lighting

Ensure you have adequate lighting, especially at night if seizures cause you to get up and wander.

- Avoid using candles, even small decorative tea lights.
- Use low energy bulbs in lamps as they give out less heat than traditional light bulbs.
- Choose lamps which have a stable base and position them carefully.

Alarms

These may be available through your local community alarm service, or may be purchased. They are linked to an automatic dialler, triggering a telephone call to named individuals or to a monitoring service.

A **bed alarm** can detect convulsive seizures occurring during sleep. Some models also monitor heart rate and breathing patterns.

A **pressure mat** alerts when a person lands on the mat, e.g. falling out of bed or wandering in a seizure.

An **enuresis sensor** detects when wetting occurs in bed during a seizure.

An **exit sensor** is triggered when a door is opened.

A **fall or tilt alarm** is worn like a pager and can summon aid where consciousness is lost without warning.

A **smoke sensor** monitored remotely may be advisable because, during a seizure, the person will not be able to hear a smoke alarm.

A **natural gas sensor** monitors gas build-up if cooker, gas fire or boiler is not properly lit.

A **carbon monoxide sensor** detects this odourless gas, which is lethal at low concentrations.

A **pill dispenser alarm** can provide an audible and visual signal when medication is due. This can be connected to a remote dialler to alert others/monitoring service if medication is not taken.

Kitchen

In the kitchen -

- use a cooker with quickly controlled heat (gas or halogen)
- fit a guard to the hob/cooker
- use back rings/burners rather than those in front
- turn pot handles inwards to avoid accidentally knocking them over
- a pan insert allows potatoes and other veg to be lifted out of the pot when cooked, allowing hot water to cool down on the cooker
- using a microwave oven may be a safer option than using the cooker
- a hot water dispenser allows boiling water to be poured easily and safely
- avoid chip pans/frying pans and deep fat fryers.

Bedroom

If you have seizures which cause you to fall out of bed, sleep on a low bed or a futon, or consider placing a fall-out mat alongside the bed.

If you have seizures when asleep, consider using special breathable pillows.

Bedside furniture should be a safe distance from the bed. Hot water bottles are best avoided as they can scald. A microwaveable wheat bag is a safer option. An electric blanket should be turned off before getting into bed.

Bathroom

Bathrooms carry particular risks within the home. For people with epilepsy, a shower is generally safer than a bath, although neither option is risk-free. If at all possible, only take a bath or shower when there is someone else in the house

Precautions to ensure quick access in case of emergency

- a sliding or folding door, or one that opens outwards
- don't lock the door.

Showers

- a walk-in shower with a non-slip floor or mat is preferable
- grab rails help with balance
- use a shower seat
- choose a thermostatically controlled shower.

Baths

- use a non-slip bathmat
- fit grab rails
- run the cold water first to ensure the water is not too hot
- keep water shallow and minimise time spent in the bath
- cushion taps and hard edges with towels.

For specific advice about your own bathroom, speak to an occupational therapist or epilepsy fieldworker. Your local authority may be able to provide help with bathroom adaptations.

Electrical Appliances

Kettles, irons, hair dryers and straighteners and DIY tools can be dropped during a seizure causing serious scalds, burns and fires. Use cordless equipment with automatic cut-outs. Where possible, consider fitting extra power sockets to avoid using extension cables.

In the garden

- Grass, bark chippings and wooden decking may be a better choice than concrete or stone surfaces.
- Avoid prickly shrubs and hedges and uncovered ponds. Safety grids for ponds must be load-bearing and properly secured.
- Use powered mowers and other tools with care—avoid trailing flexes.
- Use equipment with automatic cut-outs.
- Be aware of the potential danger posed by barbecues and other sources of heat.
- Consider replacing steps with ramps to lessen risk of injury in seizures.

Medication

Keep securely stored out of children's reach.

First Aid

Keep a First Aid box handy and up-to-date..

Keep a list of emergency contacts handy, e.g. family, GP, carers, neighbours, with a description of your seizures and what should be done in an emergency. Log your emergency contact number under I.C.E. (In Case of Emergencies) in your mobile phone address book.

Contact Epilepsy Connections for more information about safety equipment and adaptations at home.

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Supporting people with epilepsy

Head Office

100 Wellington Street
Glasgow G2 6DH
tel: 0141.248.4125
fax: 0141.248.5887

Forth Valley Fieldwork Service

Administration Offices
Falkirk Community Hospital
Westburn Avenue
Falkirk FK1 5QE
tel: 01324 673750

Email: info@epilepsyconnections.org.uk
Website: www.epilepsyconnections.org.uk