

Most people with epilepsy are able to work in the type of job they choose and do not need special help to become employed. Limitations to employment can occur if seizures are not well controlled and there is misunderstanding about epilepsy. Many issues influence the type of employment for which a person is suited.

Employment for people with epilepsy is often influenced by:

- ❖ Seizure type and frequency
- ❖ Time of day seizures occur
- ❖ Whether the seizures are controlled by medication
- ❖ The risks involved if a seizure occurs in the workplace

What jobs should I avoid if I do not have good seizure control?

There are very few jobs that are unsuitable for a person with epilepsy. However some jobs involve considerable risk if seizures are not controlled. These include working:

- ❖ At heights e.g. aircraft pilot
- ❖ Near or in water
- ❖ With or around heavy and unguarded machinery
- ❖ In a job that involves the use of firearms e.g. jobs in defence force
- ❖ In any job that requires driving e.g. bus driver

Shift work may be difficult for people whose seizures are triggered by persistent tiredness or sleep disturbance.



What jobs can I do?

Almost any job is possible as long as your safety and the safety of colleagues and the community is not at risk. Remember, everyone has limitations so be realistic about your skills. If you are not successful at getting a particular job it most probably is not because of your epilepsy.

Can I get work that involves driving?

A person with epilepsy can be employed in a job that involves driving as long as they have a current driver's licence according to Australian regulations. Ask Epilepsy Action for information about the criteria for obtaining a licence.

I have a job but I am afraid I will lose it.

If someone develops epilepsy or their seizures are likely to impede their work, an employer is expected to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace such as changing work hours or transferring the person to another job within the organisation while their epilepsy is reviewed.

Will working with computers trigger a seizure?

For most people with epilepsy, working with computers does not increase or trigger seizures. However, in **photosensitive epilepsy** seizures can be triggered by a flashing or flickering light or change in geometric shapes and patterns. This occurs in approximately 5% of people with epilepsy, so is quite uncommon.

People with this type of epilepsy may be sensitive to computers, but most monitors flicker at a frequency that does not tend to provoke seizures. Laptop computers, which have a liquid crystal display, are even less likely to trigger seizures. If someone is sensitive to computer screens, it is suggested that they lower the brightness on the monitor and sit at least 60cm away from the computer.

Do people with epilepsy take more sick leave?

Research has shown that people with epilepsy generally have average or less sickness absenteeism than people without epilepsy and have good job loyalty records. This is because many people with epilepsy have good seizure control with medication and therefore do not have seizures. For people experiencing seizures, time taken off work will vary from person to person according to the type and frequency of seizures experienced, and the time taken to recover afterwards.

Are there specific employment agencies that are suited to finding me a job?

- ❖ **Employment agencies** Check the Yellow Pages or local telephone book.
- ❖ **Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service (CRS)** is a Federal government funded organisation that assists people with disabilities to gain or keep employment.
- ❖ **Centrelink** Call 132 850
- ❖ **Job network** Call 136 268
- ❖ **Job search websites** e.g. www.seek.com.au or www.jobsearch.gov.au

Youth job search networks

- ❖ www.jobjuice.gov.au
- ❖ www.thesource.gov.au
- ❖ www.jobguide.dest.gov.au
- ❖ www.myfuture.edu.au
- ❖ **Centrelink** Call 132 490 for youth and student services.

Who can help me gain more skills?

- ❖ **Commonwealth Carelink** can help you find an agency in your local area.
- ❖ **Volunteering Australia** Call 03 9820 4100 or visit www.volunteeringaustralia.org.
- ❖ **Local library** may have details about what is available in your area.
- ❖ **Local colleges** like TAFE offer a wide range of adult education courses.
- ❖ **Centrelink** can assist in job education and training.

I do not drive. Is there any assistance available for travel to and from work?

- ❖ The State and Federal government provides a mobility allowance through Centrelink.
- ❖ Taxi Subsidy Schemes in each state give significant discounts for taxi fares. A letter from your neurologist is required.
- ❖ Concession public transport travel is available from Centrelink.

Should I tell an employer I have epilepsy?

Know your obligations regarding disclosure. Although a person may not be obliged to reveal their epilepsy, there are reasons why it can be useful to disclose this information to a potential or current employer. For an employer to be able to fulfil their obligations under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, they need to be aware of any condition that may require them to make changes to their working practice or environment to make it safer. This may mean making reasonable adjustments to keep a person employed if they develop epilepsy.

Questions to keep in mind about disclosure are:

- ❖ Will my seizures put the community, other employees or me at risk?
- ❖ If I have a seizure at work and have not disclosed, can I be personally liable for the consequences of a seizure?
- ❖ Is there someone to speak to regarding my obligations, such as a union representative or industrial relations personnel?
- ❖ What are my options if I am unfairly treated?
- ❖ Do my colleagues and employers understand epilepsy and seizure management?
- ❖ Will disclosing to one trusted colleague be enough?
- ❖ What are the legal responsibilities?
- ❖ Do I portray a positive attitude to my epilepsy?
- ❖ Will my colleague and employer find out about my epilepsy from someone else?
- ❖ Am I likely to have a seizure at work?

If an employer is not aware of a medical condition, they cannot be held responsible for failing to make necessary adjustments to the workplace.

When applying for a job

Application forms usually include a medical form. Whether or not to disclose epilepsy is up to the individual, although it is worth considering the possible repercussions if the medical form is signed and then later found to be inaccurate. In good practice, the medical form is detached from the job application, so the individual's medical history should not influence the people who are selecting applicants and conducting interviews.

Some people find it helpful to send a covering letter with the job application and include a letter from the neurologist or GP. Others feel that the best time to mention epilepsy is just before accepting a job offer or at a final interview. When discussing your epilepsy, project a positive attitude and be well-informed. It can be helpful not to over-emphasise the epilepsy and not to assume that having epilepsy is the reason you are unsuccessful in job applications.

How will colleagues react?

Most people want to know what to do in case of a seizure. As knowledge helps people feel more comfortable, education for colleagues, especially in seizure first-aid, is beneficial.

What concerns might an employer have?

Many employers have a good attitude towards employing people with epilepsy and try to cater for any special employment needs required. Others may have misconceptions about seizures and how they might affect the workplace. Some concerns may include:

- ❖ Increased sick leave
- ❖ Increased potential for accidents, occupational health and safety issues
- ❖ Lower productivity
- ❖ Higher compensation insurance premiums
- ❖ Attitude of colleagues

Who can help me if I think I have been discriminated against?

- ⚡ Your employer's human resource personnel
- ⚡ Your trade union
- ⚡ Your lawyer
- ⚡ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
- ⚡ Anti-discrimination Board
- ⚡ Working Women's or Women's Legal Centre
- ⚡ Disability Services
- ⚡ State Ombudsman

Accurate information can change attitudes and misconceptions. Ask Epilepsy Action about education and information for your employer and colleagues.

REFERENCES

- > The National Society for Epilepsy (NSE) January 2003

This information is given to provide accurate, general information about epilepsy. Medical information and knowledge changes rapidly and you should consult your doctor for more detailed information. This is not medical advice and you should not make any medication or treatment changes without consulting your doctor.