

FAQ'S

Our Educators answer frequently asked questions

Can the sun flickering through trees cause seizures when travelling in a car?

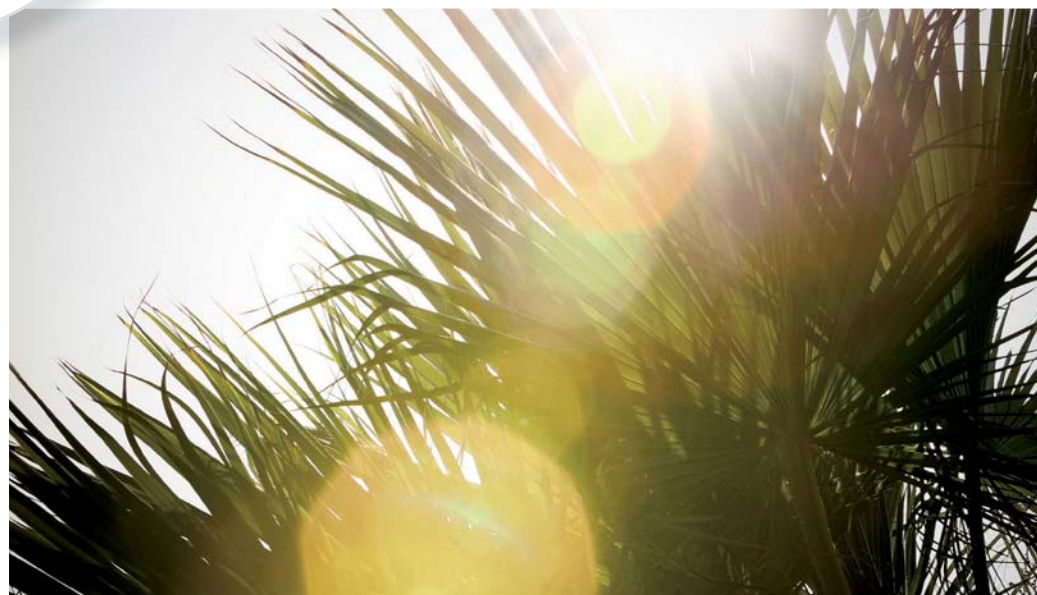
Yes. Approximately 5% of people with epilepsy have seizures evoked by visual stimuli – known as photosensitive epilepsy. Seizure triggers include sunlight interrupted by trees during a ride in the car, televisions, computers, video games, Venetian blinds, striped walls and escalators. Less common stimuli are rotating helicopter blades and malfunctioning fluorescent lighting. All are provoked by high flash frequency between 10-30 times per second, high intensity and contrast, and special wavelengths.

Why are some people's seizures more likely just after waking up?

Seizures shortly after waking occur in some epilepsy syndromes such as myoclonic seizures, which can happen 30-60 minutes after waking. Other seizures are 'state dependent.' That is, they're more probable in certain states like drowsiness, wakefulness, light sleep or deep sleep.

Can menopause affect seizures?

Changing hormone levels around menopause can affect seizures. Oestrogen can increase seizure activity but progesterone can reduce it. When levels of both hormones decrease the result is hard to predict. In one study, a third of the women with epilepsy pre-menopause reported



no change. A slightly larger proportion had worse seizures, and a slightly smaller number noted improvement. Some even had seizures for the first time at menopause, with no known cause. More studies are needed to clearly identify the effects of menopause on epilepsy.

Is it a legal requirement to disclose epilepsy when applying for work?

Although it's not always mandatory, revealing epilepsy to a potential or current employer can be a good idea. Under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, employers need to know about a condition, or they can't be held responsible for failing to adopt safety measures. Ask yourself: Will my seizures put the community, other employees or me at risk? If I don't disclose, am I personally liable for the consequences of a seizure at work? Can I ask someone my obligations, such as a union representative? What can I do if I'm unfairly treated?

Can antiepileptic drugs (AEDs) make you feel depressed?

People with epilepsy are more likely to have mood disorders than the general population. Depression may affect more than half of people with poorly controlled seizures. But it can be hard to tell if medication or epilepsy is to blame. Some AEDs may cause or worsen underlying depression and all can be linked to mood changes. Tell your doctor if you notice a change since starting a new seizure medication. It may be worth switching AEDs to see if symptoms improve.

Can osteoporosis be caused by AEDs?

Studies suggest osteoporosis (brittle bone disease) and osteomalacia (softening of the bones) are potential side effects of the medications Tegretol (Carbamazepine), Epilim (Sodium Valproate), Phenobarbital and Dilantin (Phenytoin). They may reduce the body's vitamin D level, which can lead to loss of bone mass and increase the risk of fractures. A bone density scan is advisable for long term users, especially those already at risk of osteoporosis or osteomalacia such as women undergoing menopause and older men and women.

Got a question?

We're ready to answer your queries. Post them to *Epilepsy360°*, GPO Box 9878 IN YOUR CAPITAL CITY with your return address, or email epilepsy@epilepsy.org.au. All questions will be answered. A selection will also be published in the next edition and may be edited for space or clarity.