

In the news

Our comprehensive rundown on the latest news and research surrounding epilepsy



Karate kids happier, more confident

Recent research suggests a formal exercise plan may help to reduce the psychosocial impact of epilepsy in children. In a US study, 15 eight to 16-year-olds with different seizure types undertook a 10-week karate program. Before and afterwards, children and their parents completed questionnaires to gauge quality of life and self-confidence levels. While seizures didn't change, parents said their child's memory and

ability to concentrate had improved. Meanwhile children reported increased self-esteem, particularly rating their ability and popularity at school more highly. Researchers hypothesised that the training's self-discipline increased children's sense of control and taught effective coping strategies. For more information see www.epilepsyresearch.org.uk/news/0711news/karate.htm.

Karate could increase self-esteem, suggest researchers from Boston's Massachusetts General Hospital.



Dogs that warn of seizures?

ANECDOTAL evidence suggests some dogs may be able to alert people before they have a seizure. A recent Canadian study published in *Neurology* investigated 122 pet-owning families with children who had epilepsy. Around 40% of the dogs displayed specific reactions to a seizure while about 15% seemed able to anticipate an oncoming seizure. How dogs could know isn't understood, but research has indicated they may detect subtle changes in a person's behaviour or scent preceding a seizure. According to Dianna Cooper, Director of Training at the Australian Support Dogs Inc (ASDOGS) NSW, dogs that "follow the person everywhere they go" are more likely to alert to seizures. She says dogs can alert by exhibiting different behaviour such as making intense eye contact, circling, pawing, barking or licking. While dogs can't be trained to do this, suitable dogs can learn to respond to a seizure, for instance by getting help and pulling dangerous objects out of the way. To find out more about assist dogs visit the ASDOGS websites in North Queensland at www.asdogsnq.org/index.html or NSW at www.asdog.org.au/. Applicants for a dog must be over 18 and meet other strict criteria. For more information about the Canadian seizure dogs study visit www.health24.com/medical/Focus_centres/777-2268-2552-2585,28095.asp#.

Drug works for partial seizures

THE DRUG Lamotrigine may control partial seizures when used once daily as an added therapy. A recent study monitored 239 people from the US and several other countries aged 13 or older, who were already on one or two medications which didn't completely control their partial seizures. Taking the drug along with their

other epilepsy medications, 46% had fewer seizures over 19 weeks, compared to 24% on a placebo. The study, published in *Neurology*, was sponsored and conducted by GlaxoSmithKline which markets Lamotrigine as Lamictal. For more information see www.aan.com/press/index.cfm?fuseaction=release.view&release=551.



Counting seizures an issue for drivers

A GERMAN study recently published in *Archives of Neurology* may have implications for drivers with partial epilepsy. For an average of 4.5 days, 91 adults with partial seizures were fitted with electrodes and monitored by video. They were asked to keep seizure diaries and call for a nurse when they felt a seizure coming, with about half receiving daily reminders. Patients experienced 582 partial seizures but didn't report 323. The authors concluded that "patient [partial] seizure counts are not valid and reports of complete seizure freedom may need objective evaluation" for example, for driver's licensing. For more information see <http://archneur.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/short/64/11/1561>.

Newer not always better

THE LARGEST trial of epilepsy medications has found the older Valproate better than new drugs for treating generalised seizures. More than 2,000 patients who'd had two or more unprovoked seizures in the past year participated in research which compared old and new drugs for partial and generalised seizures. With prescriptions for newer drugs on the rise, evidence was needed "to allow doctors to make informed decisions about the best first line treatment... before newer more expensive drugs became the first choice by default," says Professor David Chadwick of the UK's University of Liverpool, who led the study published in *Lancet*. For more information see <http://www.hta.ac.uk/news/newsitem161007.shtml>

FYI

If you're experiencing anxiety connected with your epilepsy, there's a chance a good night's sleep could help. A recent Norwegian study of more than 25,000 adults, published in the journal *Sleep*, has linked chronic insomnia (difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep) with the development of anxiety disorders and depression. See www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=82326 for more information.



Hormonal side-effects reversible

HORMONAL changes from the long-term use of epilepsy drugs may not be permanent. A new study published in *Epilepsia* examined serum samples taken from 130 people, 48% of them women, before and four months after they withdrew from epilepsy drugs. Findings suggested that over years of use, the common drugs Carbamazepine and Valproate could decrease fertility and

increase the incidence of reproductive endocrine disorders in both sexes. After withdrawal, however, hormones returned to normal pre-treatment levels, leading to the conclusion that negative changes "may be reversible," says study author Morten Lossius. For more information see lib.bioinfo.pl/pmid:17555526 and <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1528-1167.2007.01147.x>

Atkins diet for intractable epilepsy

THE MODIFIED Atkins diet may help adults with difficult-to-control epilepsy. In a US study, 30 people aged 18 to 53 were limited to 15g of carbohydrates daily, with plenty of fats and unrestricted fluids, protein and calories. After one and three months, 47% had a more than 50% reduction in seizures, while 33% had reduced seizures after six months. Like the ketogenic diet (see article pg 14) but less strict, the Atkins diet alters the metabolism to burn fat and produce ketones and "may be similarly beneficial... and perhaps more tolerable," says study co-author Dr Eric Kossoff. For more information see www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1528-1167.2007.01256.x and professionals.epilepsy.com/page/ar_1105110038.html.



Product picks

Track seizures by computer | Head protection for everyone | Watch your way to a better knowledge of epilepsy |



Diary with a difference

For the technologically minded, EpiTrax seizure diary software can help to track seizure activity, medication and potential triggers from exercise to mood changes, enabling you to print reports to share with doctors or email graphs to your friends and family. Software has been tested for use with operating systems including Microsoft Windows XP Home Edition SP2. For a free online trial, more information, or to purchase, visit www.neomedsoft.com/epitrax/. If you'd like a hard-copy seizure diary, ask Epilepsy Action.

Stay ahead of falls

Minimise injury during seizures with the Meyland Smith Toppen 77 Soft Helmet. Made from foam, nylon and cotton, these are lightweight, washable and ventilated, so suitable for warm weather. Sizes fit children and adults, and as the helmet is closer fitting than bike helmets it may appear less conspicuous. To buy or find out about other styles sold in your state, visit the Independent Living Centres Australia website www.ilcaustralia.org, and look under 'Clothing & Dressing' in the 'Product Search' tab.



Available in blue or red, helmets cost around \$130 plus postage.

Look and learn!

Short DVDs can be a handy tool for learning about epilepsy yourself or passing important information on to other people. In *First Aid for Seizures*, viewers learn to recognise and give first-aid for the two most common seizure types, complex partial and tonic clonic. *My Dad Has Epilepsy* features a real family's story with epilepsy facts conveyed through simple scenarios children can understand. Both are £10 each (\$AUD 22) excluding postage. Buy online at www.epilepsy.org.uk/catalog/DVDs.html.



DVDs help to bring epilepsy facts to life.