



People take risks every day, but people with epilepsy may have to deal with different risks. By becoming aware of potential risks and ways these can be lessened, activities can be much safer and most people with epilepsy can live full and active lives.

Safety factors to consider

The risk of injury due to seizures varies greatly and can depend upon:

- ◆ **Type of seizures** People who have prolonged seizures or severe seizures, clusters of seizures or frequent falls are at a higher risk. There is more chance of injury when there is a sudden loss of consciousness or awareness without warning.
- ◆ **Frequency of seizures** Someone who has many seizures a day is more at risk.
- ◆ **Age** Seniors, children and infants are more susceptible to injuries or accidents. Falls during seizures can break bones, especially in the elderly and the very young.
- ◆ **Medications** People on multiple medications or very high doses may suffer unwanted effects such as drowsiness, double vision and poor coordination.
- ◆ **Participation in high-risk activities** Consider the consequences of a seizure and possible injuries before engaging in an activity. Activities like swimming, cycling, water sports and rock climbing are risky if seizures are not controlled.
- ◆ **Known seizure triggers** Some common triggers are tiredness, lack of sleep, stress, alcohol and heat. These should be avoided or minimised as much as possible.
- ◆ Other **physical and neurological problems.**

Safety precautions should be sensible and relevant to the particular person involved, with a balance between risk and restrictions.

Practical suggestions:

- ◆ Always remember: driving without seizure control is illegal and dangerous to the community and yourself.
- ◆ Ensure friends, family and colleagues know what to do in case of a seizure.
- ◆ Medic-Alert bracelets or cards are a good idea for people with poor seizure control, especially if seizures are likely to occur in public.
- ◆ Emergency response alarms may be useful for people living alone.
- ◆ Avoid substances that may reduce the effectiveness of your medications, such as caffeine, excessive alcohol, high energy drinks and illegal drugs.

Potential accidents and injuries are:

- 1. Cuts, abrasions and bruising**
- 2. Burns**
- 3. Drowning**
- 4. Broken bones and teeth**
- 5. Suffocation**
- 6. Accidental overdose of antiepileptic medication**

Preventative measures can reduce the opportunity for accidents to occur.**1 To reduce the likelihood of cuts/abrasions/bruising:**

- ◆ Reduce clutter, sharp or jutting edges and corners around the home.
- ◆ Use a shower curtain rather than a glass screen. Use a shower chair if necessary.
- ◆ Reinforced glass doors are preferable or apply safety film to existing glass.
- ◆ Wear rubber gloves to wash dishes. When loading a dishwasher, position points and sharp edges downwards.
- ◆ Use non-breakable crockery and cordless electrical appliances with automatic off switch.
- ◆ Minimise the use of knives by buying pre-sliced food when possible.
- ◆ Use an electric shaver rather than a razor.

2 To prevent burns:

- ◆ Hot water systems, spas and heaters need to be temperature controlled.
- ◆ Avoid lightweight and free-standing heaters. Wall-mounted heaters or central heating are preferable. Place fixed safety guards around the fireplace.
- ◆ Where possible use a hand-held shower and always turn the cold water on first and off last.
- ◆ It is preferable to use a microwave rather than a stove or conventional oven.
- ◆ Use the back elements of a stove and turn pot handles away when cooking.
- ◆ Avoid carrying hot dishes of food or liquid by serving meals from the kitchen bench.
- ◆ Do not light candles or fires when alone.

3 To prevent drowning:

- ◆ Never swim alone.
- ◆ In spas, ensure the water is not too hot.
- ◆ Wear an approved life jacket for water activities, including boating and fishing.
- ◆ Avoid water sports such as scuba and high-board diving.
- ◆ Showering is recommended. Use a shower chair if necessary.
- ◆ If you only have a bath, use a hand-held shower attachment and leave the plug out.
- ◆ Do not shower or bathe while alone in the house, if possible.
- ◆ Always supervise children in the bath and around water.
- ◆ If seizures occur at regular times, shower at a time when seizures are less likely to happen.
- ◆ Preferably have bathroom doors that are outward opening, sliding, half doors or doors that are easily removed, and leave bathroom doors unlocked.
- ◆ Turn the taps off before getting into the bath.

There is a risk around water. Be alert to this and use common sense around areas such as spas, fish ponds and baths.

4 To minimise serious injuries:

- ◆ Avoid high-risk activities such as using a ladder, flying fox, or rock climbing without a harness.
- ◆ Wear a helmet when riding a bicycle, scooter, horse, or when rollerblading or skateboarding.
- ◆ Choose a low bed and avoid sleeping on a top bunk.
- ◆ Try to sleep without a pillow or use a firm porous pillow.
- ◆ Choose a wide bed that has a firm mattress with a tightly fitted sheet.
- ◆ Stand well back from the road or platform edge when waiting for a bus, tram or train.
- ◆ Try using rubber-backed mats to make bathroom floors less hazardous.
- ◆ Avoid living in accommodation with stairs.
- ◆ An alarm may help alert others to seizures at night e.g. seizure mat, baby monitor or intercom.

5 Suffocation

- ◆ Try to sleep without a pillow or use a firm porous pillow.
- ◆ Choose a low wide bed that has a firm mattress with a tightly fitted sheet.
- ◆ An alarm may help alert others to seizures at night e.g. baby monitor or intercom.

6 Accidental overdose of antiepileptic medication:

- ◆ All medications should be locked away in a cool, dry place out of reach of children and not be left in pockets or handbags. If a dose is missed, the next dose should be taken as normal. Do not double the dose.
- ◆ Discuss possible medication reactions with the pharmacist and the doctor before taking any other prescription or over-the-counter medications.
- ◆ Consult the doctor before altering the prescribed medication regimen.
- ◆ Use a diary, pill box or chemist tray pack to ensure that medications are taken as prescribed.

Poison information 13 11 26

Seizures during sleep

Many families are concerned for the safety of their loved ones while they are asleep. This is of particular concern to parents of young children who have seizures and families of people living alone. Family or parents do not need to stay awake watching for seizures. Everyone needs sleep, and this practice creates tiredness and dysfunction in the whole household.

Some suggestions to help overcome this concern are to:

- ◆ Place a baby monitor in the child's bedroom to hear any abnormal noises (monitors are available from most stores).
- ◆ Try a seizure mat that detect movement during a tonic clonic seizure.
- ◆ Sew bells to the bedspread or doona cover.

Living alone

Living alone may or may not be a lifestyle choice. Many people who live alone enjoy their independence, which is important in maintaining a healthy self-esteem and control over one's life. A common concern for people with uncontrolled seizures is that they may have an injury caused by a seizure and nobody will know.



Some people ask family or neighbours to either phone, drop in or watch for unusual behaviour (e.g. curtains closed in daytime, lights off at night).

There are also a number of alarms available that can help, ranging from telephone alarms, personal alarms, fall alarms and daily calls. These products are able to notify emergency assistance or family members should a seizure occur.

There are a large variety of options available to suit most people. Costs and service types vary.

Epilepsy Action Australia or your local council will have information on these products and services. It is also recommended an occupational therapist is consulted for advice on safety design when planning renovations, particularly of the bathroom or kitchen.

Medical identification

People commonly call an ambulance if they witness a stranger having a seizure because they are not sure of the cause. This is not always necessary and can prove to be inconvenient for the person with epilepsy, mainly due to long waits in casualty and ambulance costs (if they do not have medical insurance).

Wearing a medical ID bracelet or pendant is recommended if seizures are not controlled. If a seizure occurs in public or with strangers a medical ID bracelet or pendant will alert people to your epilepsy. This can reduce panic, make it more likely you receive appropriate help and prevent unnecessary ambulance call-outs.

Some seizures may look as if the person is drunk or on mood altering drugs and people with epilepsy can be questioned about their behaviour by police or taken to the local station. Others are either confronted or avoided by members of the public.

To find out about the different identification products available ask Epilepsy Action Australia or your pharmacist.

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.