

People with epilepsy enjoy a range of sporting activities, and with some sensible strategies swimming can be one of them. Here are some guidelines for staying safe.

Seizures and swimming

Before swimming it is important to seek the advice of the doctor although generally seizures during exercise are rare. Most sporting activities are safe as long as overexertion, dehydration and hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar) are avoided.

It is good practice for everyone to always swim with a companion, including people with epilepsy. However, a person with poorly controlled seizures needs to have other strategies in place to ensure the safest scenario if a seizure occurs. Each situation will be different depending on the person and the seizures, but some good guidelines include:

- Ensure there is always a **swimming companion** who;
 - » is aware of the person's seizures and what they look like
 - » knows what to do if a seizure occurs, in or out of the water
 - » will be in the water or close by at all times
 - » is a strong swimmer and can stand on the bottom of the pool at all times
- People with severe seizures may need two companions
- Stay close to the edge of the shallow end of the pool
- **Inform the lifeguard** on duty that you have epilepsy especially if seizures aren't controlled
- If you have had brain surgery, check with your doctor before swimming and diving.
- **A brightly coloured costume or cap** can ensure quick and easy identification.
- **A safety vest or buoyancy vest** may be necessary for people with poorly controlled seizures.
- **Wearing tinted goggles or sunglasses** may reduce seizures if flickering or reflective light is a seizure trigger [photosensitive seizures].
- **Avoid resting on the edge** of a body of water when you aren't swimming.
- Avoid swimming when tired, feeling unwell, if medication has been missed or your warning signs of a seizure are present.
- Avoid hyperventilating (deep fast breaths) or holding your breath such as swimming underwater for long periods of time.



If a seizure occurs in the water:

- **Support the person's head** so their face is out of the water.
- **Tilt their head back** to ensure a clear airway.
- **If in a pool** remove the person from the water when the jerking stops. Note: In the rare circumstance the jerking does not stop, seek assistance from others if possible, and remove the person from the water at the shallowest end of the pool.
- **If in the surf** remove the person from the water immediately.
- **Flotation devices** may be useful when removing someone from the water.
- **Seek assistance** if possible.

Once out of the water:

- **Call an ambulance immediately** even if the person is breathing as they may have inhaled water.
- **Place the person on their side.**
- **Check to see if they are breathing.**
- If there is no sign of life, **begin resuscitation.**

When the ambulance arrives inform them of details such as:

- How long did the seizure last?
- What happened during the seizure?
- How many seizures occurred?
- How aware was the person or did they regain consciousness?
- Did the person experience breathing difficulties?
- Do you think they inhaled water?
- Are there any injuries?

