

Many people with epilepsy are able to gain and maintain employment, but there may be issues that affect them at work. Limitations in the workplace can happen if seizures are not well controlled, if there are misunderstandings or preconceived ideas about epilepsy, or if the job is unsafe for someone having seizures.

The decision to seek or not seek certain jobs for people with epilepsy can be influenced by:

- The type of seizures and how often they occur
- Time of day seizures occur
- Whether the seizures are controlled by medication
- The risks involved if a seizure occurs in the workplace

If you have epilepsy and are looking for work, you need to consider things like:

- safety if a seizure happens in the workplace,
- seizure triggers - is the work stressful or long hours?
- do you need a drivers license for the job?
- do you need to tell anyone that you have epilepsy?

Unless there are serious safety hazards such as working at sea, heights or with firearms, then an employer cannot legally refuse to give you a job because you have epilepsy.

What jobs should be avoided if seizures are not controlled?

Some jobs involve considerable risk if seizures are not controlled. These include working:

- At heights
- Near or in water
- With or around heavy and unguarded machinery
- In a job that involves the use of firearms
- In any job that requires driving



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

However, there are some jobs prohibited for people with epilepsy. Even with good seizure control, someone with epilepsy will not be able to get employment such as:

- A pilot
- A deckhand or fisherman
- A commercial driver eg: public transport or truck driver

Organisations like Australian Defence Force and the Police Force have a medical process and health screening for entry. It would be best to contact the ADF, Police organisation in your state or Australian Federal Police to discuss if it is possible. You need to have a drivers license for Police recruitment.

What jobs can people with epilepsy do?

Seeking employment can be one of the biggest challenges for someone with epilepsy. Remember, safety is often the biggest

concern for many employers, and it is possible to get work as long as your safety and the safety of colleagues and the community are not at risk. Strategies can be put in place to improve safety.

If you are finding it difficult getting a job, reassess the job requirements and your skills, look at ways you can improve your qualifications and resume, ask for feedback from the interviewer to help improve your chances for future interviews. It is a competitive job market and epilepsy may not be a factor in not being offered a job.

Maintaining employment

Unfortunately, there are circumstances where someone may lose their job because of their seizures, particularly if there are safety concerns. An employer has a duty of care to provide a safe working environment for all employees as per the Work Health and Safety Act.

If seizures are likely to hinder a person's performance at work, an employer is expected where possible to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace such as changing work hours or changing roles within the organisation until seizures are controlled. If you feel your job is in jeopardy it is important to seek professional advice before agreeing to any new conditions.

Driving

A person with epilepsy can be employed in a job that involves driving if they meet the medical criteria for driving and hold a current Australian driver's licence. Strict criteria are applied to those people wanting to drive large vehicles such as trucks, buses, commercial or emergency vehicles.

For further information about the criteria for obtaining a licence call Epilepsy Action Australia or download the Seizure Smart - Driving factsheet (<https://www.epilepsy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Fact-Sheet-Driving.pdf>)

Does working with computers trigger a seizure?

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

There is a small risk people with visually stimulated seizures may be sensitive to computers. However, most computer 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. It is sometimes the content, what you are viewing, that can trigger seizures.

For people who find themselves sensitive to computer screens, it is suggested to lower the brightness on the monitor and sit at least 60cm away from the computer. Also make sure the room is well lit when using the computer.



Getting Help

There are specific employment agencies that can help find employment:

- Department of Social Services (<https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-andcarers/program-services/for-people-with-disability/employment-for-people-with-disability>)
- Australian Apprenticeships Call 13 38 73 (<http://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/>) information and resources about Australian apprenticeships and the support available.
- Job Access Call 1800 464 800 (<http://www.jobaccess.gov.au/>) a free information and advice service about the employment of people with disability.
- Job search Call 13 62 68 (<http://www.jobsearch.gov.au/>) online jobs website with job vacancies across Australia

Fact Sheet: Employment

- Job search websites: There are many to choose from, such as www.seek.com.au, <https://au.indeed.com/> or www.careerone.com.au

There are many disability employment service providers. Call us on 1300 37 45 37 or email epilepsy@epilepsy.org.au for more details.

Youth job search networks:

- PaTh internship <https://jobsearch.gov.au/videos/search-for-a-youth-jobs-path-internship>
- Headspace - Employment services and supports <https://headspace.org.au/young-people/list-of-employment-services-and-support/>
- jobactive <https://jobsearch.gov.au/path>
- Centrelink: Call 132 490 for youth and student services

Who can help with gaining more skills?

- Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centres can help find a local employment agency. Call 1800 052 222
- Volunteering Australia Call 02 6251 4060 or visit www.volunteeringaustralia.org
- Local colleges like TAFE offer a wide range of adult education courses.
- Centrelink can assist in job education and training. Call 136 150

Is there any assistance available for travel to and from work if a person does not drive?

- The State and Federal government provides a mobility allowance through Centrelink. <http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/mobility-allowance> Mobility Allowance provides financial assistance for people with disability, illness or injury aged 16 years or over who cannot use public transport without significant assistance and need to travel to and from their home for work (including volunteer work), training or job seeking. You need to meet certain criteria.
- The Taxi Subsidy Scheme programs and eligibility differ from state to state. However, all offer significant discounts for taxi fares. Contact the transport authority for information and application forms. A letter from a neurologist is required.
- Concession public transport travel cards are available from Centrelink for eligible customers.

Telling an employer

Legally a person with epilepsy is not obliged to disclose their condition unless it affects their ability to meet the inherent requirements of a job.

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

If someone with epilepsy chooses to disclose, an employer is required by law to keep the information confidential and must obtain written consent from an employee to share the information with others.

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 human 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?
- 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

Job applications usually include a medical form. Whether or not to disclose epilepsy is an individual choice. If someone chooses not to disclose it is best to leave sections blank rather than record misinformation as there may be repercussions if the medical form is signed and then later found to be inaccurate.

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 written job offer or at a final interview. It is important to project a positive attitude and be well-informed. It can be helpful to not over-emphasise the epilepsy and not to assume that having epilepsy is the reason for not being successful in job applications.

Reactions from work colleagues and employers

Most people want to know what to do if a seizure happens. Knowledge helps people feel more comfortable, and education for colleagues, especially in seizure first-aid, is helpful and avoids poor seizure management or unnecessary ambulance call outs.

What concerns might an employer have?

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

Some concerns may include:

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

It is important for someone with epilepsy to consider the potential or actual impact their epilepsy may have on their ability to fulfil the role or affect the workplace, and to be prepared with solutions.

Workplace discrimination

If someone is facing discrimination because of their epilepsy, if possible, it is best to first attempt to resolve the situation directly with all parties involved with support from their employer's human resource personnel.

The Human Rights Commission (HRC) <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/> can also help and give guidance. There is no fee and a complaint does not need to be lodged at that point in time.

If an attempt is made to resolve the situation directly is ineffective, you can seek support from agencies such as trade unions,



a lawyer, Working Women's or Women's Legal Centre, or a legal aid representative. Alternatively, a formal complaint can be lodged with the HRC, Anti-discrimination Board, Disability Services or the State Ombudsman.

It is important to remember that many disputes are resolved through negotiation or reconciliation with a very small number ending up in court.

Being knowledgeable about seizures and epilepsy will give both the person with epilepsy and their employer on solid ground for developing strategies to minimise the impact in the workplace.

**Accurate information can change attitudes and misconceptions.
Ask Epilepsy Action Australia about education and information for employers and employees.**

Incentives for employers

Employment Assistance Fund

The Employment Assistance Fund provides financial assistance for work-related modifications, equipment and services to help people with disability get employment and perform their work as independently and productively as possible. The assistance is available to new and existing employees with disability.

For employers, the Employment Assistance Fund makes accommodating workers with disability in the workplace easier. It can help cover the costs of modifications to the physical work environment, modifications to work vehicles, adaptive technology, a wide range of information and communication devices, Auslan interpreting and specialist services for employees with specific learning disorders or mental health conditions.

The Employment Assistance Fund provides financial assistance for disability, deaf and mental health awareness training.

The assistance is tailored to the individual needs of the person with disability, their job requirements and work environment. To find out more about how the Employment Assistance Fund can help you, or to make an application for funds visit the JobAccess website (www.jobaccess.gov.au) or phone 1800 464 800.

Wage Subsidy Scheme

The Wage Subsidy Scheme offers a subsidy to employers who employ a job seeker with disability, who is registered with a Disability Employment Service Provider.

Certain requirements must be met by the employer for them to be eligible for the subsidy. This information is available on the JobAccess website.

The job must be for eight hours or more per week for at least 13 weeks and have an expectation of continuing for more than 13 weeks (or six weeks in a seasonal industry).

References:

- > Australian Employers Network on Disability <http://www.and.org.au/>
- > Australian Department of Human Services Accessed 2019
- > Epilepsy Action Australia, 'Striving for Equality in the Workplace', Epilepsy 360° Dec 2008,
- > Human Rights Commission <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/>