

People with epilepsy enjoy a range of sporting activities like anyone else, and exercise not only has fitness benefits but can also help improve mood and reduce stress. Improving overall health and wellbeing can help to reduce seizures and lessen the impact of epilepsy.

With some sensible strategies swimming can be a good form of exercise to pursue. Here are some guidelines for staying safe.

Seizures and swimming

Although seizures during exercise are uncommon, before swimming, it is important you seek the advice of your doctor.

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 happens. Each situation will be different depending on the person and the seizure type, but some good guidelines include:

- Ensure you always have a swimming companion who;
 - is aware of your seizures and what they look like,
 - knows what to do if a seizure happens, 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. If doing laps, swim in an outside lane.
- 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 you are tired or feeling unwell
- Avoid hyperventilating (deep fast breaths) or holding your breath such as swimming underwater for long periods of time.
- Keep a supply of snacks so your blood sugar doesn't drop
- If you have warning symptoms before your seizure, then remove yourself immediately from the water if you experience them

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- Try to avoid swimming at times your seizures are more likely to happen.
- Note: if you have had recent medication changes, remember this may increase the risk of you having a seizure.

What to do

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 (<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/how-to-perform-cpr>). The 000 staff will guide you through this process.

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?

