

# SEIZURE ANXIETY

## FACT SHEET



# SEIZURE ANXIETY

**We all can feel stressed or worried when under pressure, but these feelings usually pass once the stressful situation has resolved or been removed. Anxiety is more than feeling stressed or worried.**

Anxiety is your body's natural response to stress and sometimes these feelings cannot be easily controlled. It is when these feelings are ongoing and happening without reason or cause that anxiety can be problematic. It makes it hard to cope with daily life.

It is estimated that some form of anxiety disorder affects at least 25% of people with epilepsy



## Anxiety and epilepsy

After depression, anxiety is the most common type of mental health disorder seen in people with epilepsy with it being twice as common as in the general population. It is often under-recognised and undertreated.

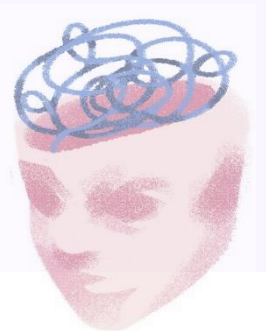
Anxiety disorders can be disabling. Anxiety can be linked with epilepsy in ways such as:

- Part of the seizure, sometimes the beginning of the seizure (aura);
- Anticipatory fear associated with an aura indicating an oncoming seizure;
- Fear of having a seizure without warning;
- An after-effect of seizure;
- An unwanted side effect of antiseizure medication;
- Anxiety can also be unrelated to the epilepsy.

## Symptoms

Symptoms of anxiety can include:

- Rapid breathing
- Tightness in the chest
- Racing heart
- Headache
- Tense muscles
- Nausea and vomiting
- Dry mouth
- Disturbed sleep
- Sweating
- Restlessness.



**Anxiety or panic attacks can cause severe physical & emotional responses. If you have anxiety & it is affecting your ability to function day to day, then seek help.**

# WHAT IS SEIZURE ANXIETY?

**Seizures by their very nature are unpredictable. It is this unpredictability and the possible loss of consciousness, control and embarrassment during seizures that people with epilepsy fear. Anxiety about having seizures, particularly in public, is very common, especially if that person has already had a bad experience.**

Some people with epilepsy worry their anxiety may cause a seizure and some are concerned that their epilepsy may be causing their panic attacks.

## When to get help

It can be difficult to take those first steps in getting help. Anxiety (and depression) can reduce your motivation or confidence to pursue advice, and you may feel uncomfortable talking about it. However, effective treatments are available so it's worth seeking support.

Seek professional help if:

- the fear and anxiety about having seizures occurs often, or all the time.
- your seizures are well controlled, but the anxiety remains.
- you are isolating yourself from your friends, family and community.
- you think that the anxiety is related to antiseizure medications.

## What to do

Anxiety management differs for each person. For someone with epilepsy and anxiety, better seizure control (if relevant) also needs to be a goal. Many people have psychological therapy, and sometimes antianxiety medication may be used.

Taking antianxiety medication can help but discuss this with your doctor as some anxiety medication may have affect your seizures or seizure medication. Some antiseizure medication also have antianxiety effects.

## Things you can do

Some simple lifestyle changes that can help make a difference. Things that you can do include:

- Learn to manage stress. If you have pressures and deadlines, make a commitment each day to take some time out and do something active or something you really enjoy. Something for you.
- Learn some relaxation techniques. Physical relaxation methods and meditation techniques really can help. A few minutes each day can help. There are many resources online or apps that can help with this.
- Look after your physical needs. Eat a healthy diet, keep active and exercise regularly. Get enough sleep and have a good sleep routine. Avoid alcohol, too much caffeine, mood altering drugs, sugar and junk food.
- Practice deep abdominal breathing.



## Things you can do

- Replace negative self talk with coping self talk. When you find you are thinking negatively, note it and try to change it to something more positive. For example, replace “I can’t do this, it’s just too hard,” with: “This is hard, but I can get through it.” It can be helpful to change thoughts that run through your mind. Make a list of frequent negative thoughts and one of positive, believable thoughts to replace them.
- Find online support to connect with people with similar symptoms and exchange ideas. Online therapies or computer-aided psychological therapy, can be just as effective as face-to-face services for people with mild to moderate anxiety and depression. There are many available.

## Can panic attacks and seizures be confused?

Panic attacks and focal seizures can have similar symptoms which can complicate a diagnosis. A good description of the episode, from you and a witness can be valuable to help distinguish between the two.

Often medical tests will be needed if the doctor has difficulty determining if you are having seizures or panic attacks, or both.

If your anxiety is having a major impact on your life, ask your doctor about finding a suitable mental health specialist to provide you with more intensive support.



**Anxiety can be exhausting and debilitating. Don’t suffer alone for too long. It helps to talk to a counsellor or psychologist, who will suggest ways for you to deal with stress in your life and teach you skills to manage anxiety.**

## Further information

Beyond Blue – [Anxiety](#)

Black Dog Institute - [Anxiety](#)

Headspace – [Anxiety](#) for young people

Mindspot - for [online assessment](#) and treatment of anxiety and depression

[Medicare Mental Health Services](#)

Contact us on:

Phone: 1300 37 45 37

Email: [epilepsy@epilepsy.org.au](mailto:epilepsy@epilepsy.org.au)

[Book a telehealth appointment with an epilepsy nurse](#)

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Disclaimer: 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.