

EPILEPSY SELF- MANAGEMENT

FACT SHEET



SELF MANAGEMENT IN EPILEPSY

Self-management includes things such as making healthy lifestyle choices and informed decisions about your treatment. It also involves having an awareness of your seizure triggers and actively monitoring and managing your symptoms.

With epilepsy, we can break this down into:

- Medical management - taking your medication as prescribed, having regular reviews with the doctor and reporting any seizures or medication effects
- Seizure management - understanding and avoiding triggers and keeping a diary of your seizures to determine patterns
- Lifestyle management - eating well, managing stress, getting enough sleep and exercise

These practical tips may help you better manage your seizures and improve quality of life



Medications

Many people with epilepsy report memory problems to some degree, so to help you remember to take your medications every day, some practical tips are suggested below:

- Try to make it part of your daily routine like taking medications at mealtimes
- Put your medication in a safe, visible place as a reminder (out of reach of children)
- Set a watch, phone or alarm to remind you or use a medication app
- Use a chart or calendar to mark when you have taken your medication
- Consider a pillbox or ask your pharmacist to pack your medications into a blister pack. These have the day and time you are supposed to take the tablets
- Ask someone to remind you

Different brands. Your pharmacist may offer your medication in a different brand to the one you normally take. Be aware that a different brand may not be exactly the same as the original brand - the non-active ingredients may differ – these include fillers, binders, coating or colouring.

While specific guidelines and tests are done to make sure these medications are the same, a slight degree of variation is allowed. These slight variations may affect seizure control or create unwanted side-effects. For some people, the slightest change can make a difference.

Other brands have a different name, different packaging, different tablets, and may be slightly cheaper but we suggest sticking with the brand you know works for you.

Other medication. Medications for other health conditions, including over-the-counter medication may interfere with your antiseizure medication, or make you more prone to having seizures.

Speak to your doctor or pharmacist before taking any new medication.

If your antiseizure medication is working, stick with it - do not switch brands without discussing with your neurologist or prescribing doctor.

SUBSTANCES AND SUPPLEMENTS

These therapies may be used alongside your conventional medical treatments.

It is important to understand that while they may have positive effects, many of these therapies also have side effects. They are not intended to replace antiseizure medications, but some people find them helpful in managing stress, improving well-being, and potentially reducing seizure frequency.

While most complementary therapies and supplements are relatively safe in recommended doses, incorrect doses can be dangerous. Some may trigger seizures, some may react with your antiseizure medication, or other medication if you have other health conditions. If you don't lead good health, or are over 65 years, the recommended dose may be too high for you.

Substances that can affect seizures

Caffeine is a stimulant found in coffee, tea, chocolate, many soft drinks, energy drinks, & some medications — including diet pills, antihistamines, and decongestants. For people with epilepsy, having too much caffeine can increase the risk of seizures. It may also interfere with anti-seizure medications and affect sleep patterns.

Guarana, is a common ingredient in energy drinks and a very high source of caffeine, double that of coffee beans. In its natural form it may offer some health benefits, but added to high sugar, processed drinks and edibles it can have negative effects.

Supplements to avoid*

Commonly used substances known to possibly increase seizures include Gingko Biloba and St John's Wort. These may interact with some antiseizure medications.

Other less commonly used products that have been reported to cause seizures in isolated cases include:

- Bearberry, black cohosh root, ephedrine, guarana extract, ginseng, kava kava, borage, and water-hemlock weed.
- Essential oils such as eucalyptus, fennel, hyssop, pennyroyal, rosemary, sage, savin, tansy, thuja, turpentine, and wormwood.

**This list is not exhaustive. Speak to your doctor before taking any complementary medicines or supplements.*

Everyone reacts differently to caffeine, but a general guideline is to keep intake below 600 mg per day — roughly four cups of coffee or five to six cups of tea.

For someone with epilepsy, a safer limit is likely lower. Aim for no more than two to three caffeinated drinks daily.

Avoid energy drinks, but if you do wish to drink them, keep your intake occasional and never mix with alcohol.



The exact reason why these may cause seizures is not known, sometimes it may be related to how they react with antiseizure medication sometimes it may be potentially toxic to your nervous system.

This does not mean you shouldn't take vitamins or supplements.

Speak to your doctor about taking a regular vitamin supplement if you feel this is what you want to do to maintain good health.



LIFESTYLE CHANGES TO SUPPORT SEIZURE CONTROL

Seizure triggers



You may become aware that specific events or circumstances can set off or “trigger” your seizures. These are called seizure triggers.

Commonly reported seizure triggers include:

- Missed medication
- Lack of sleep
- Physical fatigue and exhaustion
- Stress, excitement, emotional upset
- Menstruation/hormonal changes
- Illness or fever
- Poor diet or low blood sugar
- Flashing lights or geometric patterns
- Other medications
- Alcohol or drug use

Sleep



Lack of sleep is a common trigger for seizures.

- Aim for 7–9 hours of sleep nightly.
- Maintain a consistent sleep schedule. Go to bed and rise at the same time each day.
- Avoid sleep deprivation, frequent late nights or shift work

Excessive tiredness and sleepiness may be a sign that medications need reviewing or there may be other causes.

If you suffer from sleeplessness or overtiredness discuss this with your doctor.

Exercise and nutrition

Being active and eating well is a great way to look after your mind and body.

Regular exercise can help reduce stress, improve sleep, boost your mood, and support overall wellbeing.

A balanced diet with plenty of fruit, vegetables, whole grains, and water can help keep your energy steady and may reduce possible seizure triggers like tiredness or low blood sugar.

- Engage in regular exercise.
- Drink water and avoid overexertion.
- Eat balanced meals regularly.
- Avoid skipping meals or fasting.

Stress



Recognise and respond to stress

Today, many of us are exposed to different modern-day stressors which are often long lasting, sometimes from weeks to years. With continued stress, our body becomes weaker and more susceptible to illness.

- Practice relaxation techniques: meditation, yoga, deep breathing. Whatever works for you.
- Avoid high-stress environments when possible.
- Engage in activities that help you unwind – reading, art, music, or spending time in nature.
- There are online courses and tools that can be used to help manage stress
- Seek counseling or support groups if needed.



Know your seizure triggers and try to avoid them

SELF MANAGEMENT

Build a supportive routine

Learn about your type of epilepsy, your treatment, your triggers and side effects

Keep a seizure diary

- Track seizure frequency, duration, and setting
- Note sleep, stress, food and activities before each episode
- Helps identify personal triggers and patterns

Take medication as prescribed

- Check before taking other medication or supplements

Have an Epilepsy Management Plan

Wear medical ID, for example a bracelet.

Keep regular medical follow-ups and reviews

Have a good support network

Join epilepsy support groups for shared experiences.

Look after yourself – eat well, get enough sleep, exercise and manage stress and mental health

Further information:

[EAA Online tools and resources](#)

[EAA Online communities](#)

[Wellbeing Neuro Course](#) specifically for people with neurological conditions

This Way Up – a [free online course to manage stress](#)

Contact us on:

Phone: 1300 37 45 37

Email: epilepsy@epilepsy.org.au

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

Visit our website



Disclaimer: This information is given to provide accurate, general information about epilepsy. Medical information & knowledge changes rapidly & you should consult your doctor for more detailed information. This is not medical advice, & you should not make any medication or treatment changes without consulting your doctor.