

TEENS & EPILEPSY

FACT SHEET



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This is a time full of big life changes – finishing school, starting work, exploring relationships, learning to drive, and navigating social situations.

It's a lot for anyone to manage, and when you're living with epilepsy, there can be extra challenges to think about. But here's the good news: understanding your epilepsy, knowing your triggers, and doing your part to manage it can make a difference. You'll feel better equipped to handle whatever comes your way



What is epilepsy?

Epilepsy is when you have a tendency to have recurrent seizures. Having epilepsy usually means that you have had one or more seizures and are likely to have others if they are not treated.

Seizures are sudden, temporary changes in brain activity. During a seizure, the brain cells fire much faster and all at once. This can affect your level of consciousness, body movements, behaviour and how you think or feel.

Some seizures can happen as a reaction to specific circumstances such as a head trauma, serious illness, drugs or alcohol. These types of seizures are not diagnosed as epilepsy.

What are seizure triggers?

Sometimes you may become aware of circumstances can set off or “trigger” your seizures.

Seizure triggers differ and identifying your triggers can help you to reduce or even avoid seizures.

People with epilepsy commonly report seizure triggers such as:

- Lack of sleep or over-tiredness;
- Missing medication;
- Emotional or physical stress.



What causes epilepsy?

There are many known causes of epilepsy, but many people never find out the cause of their epilepsy.

Some of the known causes include:

- Traumatic injuries to the brain, such as in a car accident or serious fall
- Lack of oxygen to the brain. For instance, this could happen at birth, or from an accident, drowning or a drug overdose
- Strokes or bleeds in the brain
- Infections of the brain such as meningitis, encephalitis or a brain abscess
- Some types of epilepsies have a genetic cause, and some types can run in families.

Other triggers include:

- Being unwell such as having colds, flu or vomiting and diarrhoea;
- Hormonal changes in females;
- Flashing lights or geometric patterns;
- Growth spurts in children and adolescents;
- Drug and alcohol use;
- Other medications.

LIVING WITH EPILEPSY

When living with epilepsy you can have many ups and downs. It is much more than seizures. Other people's attitudes and misunderstandings about epilepsy can be more difficult to manage than the epilepsy itself.

Just remember:

- Epilepsy is not always a lifelong condition
- 2 in 3 people stop having seizures with medication
- Many people with epilepsy have never had a convulsive seizure
- Epilepsy is condition of the brain, NOT a mental, emotional or psychological problem
- Epilepsy should not be a barrier to leading a good life
- A healthy, active life is an important part of managing your epilepsy
- Always take your meds as prescribed
- Be positive - you can do anything you put your mind to

Driving



Being able to drive is an important part of most people's lives. Losing your licence can be a big hit to your independence and freedom.

If seizures are controlled, it is usually possible to get a driving licence.

Some advice about getting your driver's licence:

- As you get close to driving age, it may be worth having your epilepsy reviewed. If you have had no seizures for at least 2 years, ask your doctor if there is a chance to wean medications a good 6 to 12 months before getting your licence. *This may not be possible for some types of epilepsy.*
- If your seizures are not controlled, this may be a good time for further review and possible changes to your treatment plan.
- Taking your medication as prescribed and staying healthy really helps with seizure control.
- Check the [Assessing Fitness to Drive](#) for guidelines for driving
- Unfortunately, not everyone will be able to get their license.
- If you cannot drive: Catch a lift with a friend. Take the bus. Call a cab. Ride a bike. Walk. There are plenty of other ways to get around. And remember, it may not always be like this.

School or Uni

Some people with epilepsy can have difficulties with attention, concentration and memory. Find out what your school or university offers to help - there are many ways they can support you with special provisions.

Special provisions are adjustments to school or university assessments to ensure students with a disability, illness, or other disadvantage have a fair opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge.

Parents or teachers may have expectations that are above or below your ability. Sometimes a different environment or teaching technique is all that is needed to help you learn or understand how you learn best.

LIFESTYLE

Sleep



Not getting enough sleep is a common trigger for seizures. When you're tired, your brain has to work harder, which can increase stress on your body and make seizures more likely.

If you have exams or assignments, try to plan ahead so you don't need to pull all-nighters. For social events, you might find it helpful to have a nap beforehand, and sleep in the next morning if you can.

The most important thing is to keep a regular sleep routine—try to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day. This consistency supports your overall wellbeing and can help with seizure control.

Sport



Physical exercise benefits the brain and body. It can help you think, learn, remember, improve mood and focus, and reduce stress. If your seizures are not well controlled though, it is best to avoid water sports like scuba diving, swimming alone, or sports at heights such as skydiving or free rock climbing. Otherwise, get into it – however, you can.

Friends and dating



Friends are an important support. If they know about your epilepsy, they can understand what you're dealing with and respect your choices – like avoiding late nights or drinking. Most friends are willing to help but they just might not know what to do if you have a seizure. Talking about it can make everyone feel more confident. A good friend listens, supports you – like respecting your choices around sleep, alcohol, or anything else that affects your health – and sticks around.

Dating can be awkward for everyone. You might wonder when to tell someone about your epilepsy, but there's no set rule. Share it when you feel comfortable and when you trust that person. If someone rejects you because of your epilepsy, then they're not the right person for you. The people who matter will want to understand and support you.

Mood and mental health



Having epilepsy can sometimes affect how you feel emotionally. Some young people with epilepsy experience low mood or depression, and this can happen for lots of reasons – like dealing with a long-term condition, feeling different from others, side effects from medication, or worrying about seizures.

Feeling this way can make everyday things harder, like school, friendships, or enjoying activities you normally like. In some cases, it may also lead to thoughts of self-harm.

If you notice you're feeling sad, stressed, overwhelmed, or disconnected for more than a couple of weeks, it's really important to talk to someone – a parent, carer, teacher, doctor, or a friend you trust. Getting support early can make a big difference and help you manage both your mental health and your epilepsy.

You're not alone, and support is available.

REMEMBER

- Believe in yourself and spend time doing what makes you happy.
- You are more than epilepsy. You have interests, feelings, strengths, and weaknesses - epilepsy is just one part of who you are.
- Stay social. Join in with friends and everyday activities.
- Connect with others. Talking to people with epilepsy or similar experiences can give you new ideas for coping and support.
- It's okay to have bad days. Everyone does. Remember they pass, and better days will come.
- Keep up your hobbies or explore new interests—doing things you enjoy helps you feel more like yourself.
- See challenges as opportunities. Life might be tough sometimes, but there's always hope.
- Use humour when it helps. Light jokes can ease awkward moments and make others feel more comfortable.
- Accept help. Letting people support you doesn't make you weak - it's part of staying strong.



Lifeline Australia 13 11 14 Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 Headspace 1800 650 890

Teens and young adult resources

To support young people with epilepsy, we have tools, resources and an online community specifically designed for this age group:

[Teens and Young Adults](#)

[Other EAA resources](#)

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 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.