

Epilepsy & Seizures: **Seizures & Safety**

Seizures & Safety

Information for people with seizures



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Disclaimer:

This publication is designed to provide general information about epilepsy and seizures to the public. It is not intended as medical advice. People with epilepsy should not make changes to their treatment or activities based on this information without first consulting their health care provider.

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Table of Contents

Safety and you	2
Safety around the house.....	3
General first aid for seizures	10
Safety outdoors.....	14
Safety for children.....	15
When a parent has seizures.....	16
Getting support.....	18

Safety and you

If you have epilepsy, you may have seizures that make you blackout or fall unexpectedly.

Most seizures will not hurt you. However, you can get hurt if you have seizures in certain places, so be aware of your surroundings.

Some dangers are easy to spot, like deep water or the edge of a cliff. Some dangers are hidden in places like the kitchen or bathroom.

Does this mean you have to stop doing everything and not go anywhere at all?

NO. Chances are, just a few simple changes can help you be safe and still lead an active life.

Think and plan ahead.

Safety every day

The following tips will help you live more safely with seizures. You can use them to help your children or other caregivers be safer, too.

- Make sure everyone in the family knows what to do when you have a seizure.
- Make sure they know when to call for help.
- Wear a medical ID bracelet or necklace that says you have epilepsy.
- Take your medicine on time, everyday. Use reminders on phones or pillboxes to help you remember to take your medicine.
- Try to get enough sleep. Not getting enough sleep can lead to more seizures.
- Do not drink a lot of alcohol or use illegal drugs. Both can cause seizures.
- If you have a warning before a seizure, lie down on your side and not near any hard or sharp objects.
- Carry a cell phone in case you need help.
- Keep your appointments as scheduled with your health care provider.

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“ Right from the beginning we taught our kids what to do if mommy falls and shakes and does not wake up. ”



Safety around the house

Bathrooms and kitchens can be dangerous places for someone who may suddenly blackout or fall. Here are some things you can do to make these places safer.

In the bathroom

- Hang bathroom doors so they open out instead of in. Your family will be able to open the door if you have a seizure and fall against it.
- Use safety glass, plastic, or a shower curtain for a shower door. Use safety glass in mirrors too.
- Leave the bathroom door unlocked. That allows people to get in and help if you have a seizure.
- Take a shower rather than a bath.
- When taking a shower have someone nearby to assist if you have a seizure.

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- Use a rubber mat or non-skid strips in the bathtub or shower to lessen the risk of falls.
- Check that the shower drain is working. Install a shower with a flat floor to avoid pooling of water.
- Consider installing a shower seat with a safety strap.
- Make sure the water is not too hot when you shower or take a bath so that it cannot burn you if you blackout. Consider installing an anti-scald device.
- Always turn on cold water first and shut off cold water last.
- Use soap trays set within the wall that do not stick out into the shower or tub.
- Use an electric shaver instead of a razor. **Avoid using electric shaver or other appliances near running water in case you drop it during a seizure.**
- Avoid using electrical appliances near a shower or sink.
- Put padding and bathroom carpeting on the floor. A softer surface is safer if you fall.
- Install a padded toilet seat.

“My daughter had drop seizures without any warning and I always had to be extra careful when she was in the shower.”



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In the kitchen

- Use a microwave for most of your cooking.
- Use an electric or gas stove **only** when someone else is home. Use the back burners or a toaster oven to avoid burns.
- Serve hot things directly from the stove onto plates.
- Rather than lift containers with hot contents, slide them on counter tops. Use a cart to carry hot items across longer distances in the house.
- Use plastic or paper plates and drinking cups instead of china, ceramic, or glass.
- Use cups with lids so you do not get burns from spilling hot liquids.
- Use unbreakable dishware.
- Use long oven mitts when you take food out of a hot oven to avoid burns.
- Carve meat or poultry with a regular knife, not an electric slicer. Use presliced food when you can.
- Position pot handles toward the back of the stove.
- Avoid carrying very hot liquids.
- Sit whenever possible.
- Keep commonly used items on lower shelves.
- Keep electrical wires and appliances away from water.
- Make sure your home has a working smoke detector alarm on each level.



“ I love to cook, but there are some precautions I need to take to make sure I don’t get hurt. When I am at the stove, I make sure my wife is in the kitchen with me just in case. ”

In the bedroom

- Consider using a seizure alert device, detection system, or other monitor to alert someone when a seizure occurs.
- Avoid hard or sharp-edged bed frames, tables, or dressers.
- Sleep in a low-lying bed and do not sleep on a top bunk. Use non-skid rugs next to the bed in case you fall.
- If you have shaking during your seizures, move your bed away from the walls, radiators, night tables, and hard surfaces. Consider placing a mattress or cushion around the bed.
- Make sure your partner/spouse knows to place you on your side in the event of a seizure.
- Don't pull covers over your face or head while sleeping. Sleep on your side or back.

Around the house



“ We have this large country style table in our dining room. One problem is that the table corners are sharp. After almost hitting my head once, I found some attractive corner guards. You hardly even notice they are there – and they give me peace of mind. ”

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- Remove clutter from the floor to avoid tripping.
- Be particularly careful with the use of tools like circular saws, drills, or sawing machines. **Never use electrical tools alone and make sure they have automatic shut-offs.**
- If you wander during or after a seizure, lock outside doors. Consider setting alarms that alert others that an outside door is open.
- Avoid ironing clothes when alone.
- Put padding on square table corners and other furniture with sharp edges. Better yet, purchase furniture with rounded edges. Catalogs for baby and toddler supplies offer special padding in many shapes and sizes.
- Do not carry lighted candles around the house. Place candles where you will not knock them over during a seizure.
- Don't light candles or fireplaces when alone. Do not carry hot ashes from the fireplace through the house. Place guards around all fireplaces.
- Be careful with the use of hot appliances. Use appliances with automatic shut-off switches.
- Avoid smoking, both for health and safety reasons.
- Install softer flooring instead of hardwood floors. Consider installing carpeting with thick padding.
- Put carpeting on staircases and at the bottom to reduce injury from a fall. Remove obstructions near staircases.
- Try using heating systems that do not require a radiator. Avoid freestanding heaters and avoid those that can easily tip over.
- If you have radiators, use covers on top.

On the outside of the house

- If you mow the lawn, use a mower with a “deadman’s handle.” This kind of mower stops running if you stop holding the handle.
- When using outdoor tools, wear protective eyewear, gloves, and appropriate footwear. Sit on a low workbench.
- Consider installing “outdoor carpeting” on hard surfaces.
- At barbecues, ask someone else to do the grilling.

In the workplace

- Talk to your doctor about whether certain duties would risk your health or safety. Due to safety concerns, certain jobs may not be available if you have seizures.
- Think about safety risks in your workplace and see if you can change anything to reduce these risks. Consider installing carpeting or cushioned mats on the floor around your work area.
- If you might have a seizure at work, consider speaking to your employer about creating a seizure response plan so others know how to help. This plan should include:
 - Warning signs of a possible seizure
 - How and when to provide help
 - Whom to contact if you need other help
 - When to call an ambulance
- Ask your employer for an opportunity to teach co-workers about epilepsy. You can then address concerns or misunderstandings they may have.
- Be careful when climbing ladders. If you work at heights, use safety harnesses or belts to keep you from falling.
- Avoid sites with extreme temperatures or with pools of water.
- Be particularly careful around machinery. Use equipment with automatic shut-off and guards in place. Wear safety clothing.
- Try to avoid work-related sleep deprivation or exhaustion. Learn coping strategies to reduce stress.
- Keep a pillow available for coworkers to place under your head should you have a seizure. Demonstrate how to place the pillow to avoid possible suffocation.
- Keep extra clothes at the workplace in case you need to change after a seizure.

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Safety when traveling

- Do not drive without a valid license. Check with your state motor vehicle administration for any state driving regulations.
- Consider taking the bus or other public transportation, if available.
- Seek out special bus or taxi services for people with disabilities.
- If you ride a bike, protect yourself with a helmet, kneepads, and elbow pads, if needed. Keep to side roads as much as you can.
- If you are waiting for a bus or train, stand back from the road or the edge of the platform.
- If you are at risk for walking into danger during a seizure, travel with a partner.
- Sometimes a taxi or rideshare may be the best choice. Your safety is worth the extra cost.
- Stay away from long, steep escalators. Take an elevator instead.
- Carry information with you about your condition, medications, and emergency contacts. Consider wearing a medical ID bracelet.
- When traveling by air, carry an extra supply of medication in your carry-on bag in case your luggage is lost. Bring extra medication in case your return home is delayed.
- Travel with others if possible.



General first aid for seizures

The first line of response when a person has a seizure is to provide general care and comfort and keep the person safe. For the majority of seizures, basic seizure first aid is all that is necessary.

Always stay with the person until the seizure is over.

- Seizures can be unpredictable and it is hard to tell how long they may last or what will occur during the seizure.
- Some seizures may start with minor symptoms, but lead to a loss of consciousness or a fall.
- Other seizures may only last a few seconds.
- Injuries requiring help from other people can occur during or after a seizure.

Pay attention to the length of the seizure

- Look at your watch or phone and time the seizure from beginning to the end of the active seizure.
- Time how long it takes for the person to recover and return to their usual activity.
- If the active seizure lasts longer than the person's typical seizures, call for help.
- Know when to give 'as needed' or rescue treatments, if prescribed, and when to call for emergency help.



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Stay calm, most seizures only last a few minutes

- A person's response to a seizure can affect how other people act. If the first person remains calm, it will help others stay calm, too.
- Talk calmly and reassuringly to the person during and after the seizure - it will help as they recover from the seizure.

Prevent injury by moving nearby objects out of the way

- Remove sharp objects.
- If you cannot move surrounding objects or a person is wandering or confused, help steer them away from dangerous situations, for example, away from traffic, train or subway platforms, heights, or sharp objects.

Make the person as comfortable as possible

- Help them sit down in a safe place.
- If they are at risk of falling, call for help and lay them down on the floor.
- Support the person's head to prevent it from hitting the floor.

Keep onlookers away

- Once the situation is under control, encourage people to step back and give the person some room. Waking up to a crowd can be embarrassing and confusing.
- Ask someone to stay nearby in case the person needs further help.

Do not forcibly hold the person down

- Trying to stop movements or forcibly holding a person down does not stop a seizure.
- Restraining a person can lead to injuries and make the person more confused, agitated or aggressive.
- People do not fight on purpose during a seizure - yet if someone restrains them when they are confused, they may respond aggressively.
- If a person tries to walk around, let them walk in a safe, enclosed area if possible.

Do not put anything in the person's mouth

- Jaw and face muscles may tighten during a seizure, causing the person to bite down. If this happens when something is in the mouth, the person may break and swallow the object or break their teeth.
- Do not worry - a person cannot swallow their tongue during a seizure.

Make sure their breathing is okay

- If the person is lying down, turn them on their side with their mouth pointing to the ground. This prevents saliva from blocking their airway and helps the person breathe more easily.
- During a generalized tonic-clonic seizure, it may look like the person has stopped breathing. This happens when the chest muscles tighten during the tonic phase of a seizure. As this part of a seizure ends, the muscles will relax and breathing will resume normally.
- It is not necessary to provide rescue breathing or CPR during these seizure-induced changes in a person's breathing.

Do not give water, pills, or food by mouth unless the person is fully alert

- If a person is not fully awake or aware of what is going on, they might not swallow correctly. Food, liquid, or pills could go into the lungs instead of the stomach if they try to drink or eat at this time.
- If a person appears to be choking, turn them on their side and call for help. If they are not able to cough and clear their air passages on their own or are having breathing difficulties, call 911 immediately and give emergency help.

Call for emergency medical help when:

- A seizure lasts 5 minutes or longer.
- One seizure occurs right after another without the person regaining consciousness or coming to between seizures.
- Seizures occur closer together than usual for that person.
- Breathing becomes difficult or the person appears to be choking.
- The seizure occurs in water.
- Injury may have occurred.
- The person asks for medical help.
- When the person has no history of seizures.

Be sensitive and supportive, and ask others to do the same.

- Seizures can be frightening for the person having one, as well as for others.
- People may feel embarrassed or confused about what happened.
- Once they are alert and able to communicate, tell them what happened in very simple terms.
- Offer to stay with the person until they are ready to go back to normal activity or call someone to stay with them.

Safety outdoors



“ I found out that my pool has special times for people with disabilities to swim. During those times, more people are watching swimmers and there are fewer swimmers in the pool. I feel a lot safer – and I get to swim again. ”

- When you exercise, take many breaks. Try to stay cool.
- Are you taking up a new sport? Get to know the sport ahead of time. Ask yourself, would I get hurt if I blackout while doing this?
- The buddy system is best for skiing and swimming safety. Pools may be safer than open bodies of water such as the ocean or lake.
- Talk to your health care provider about new activities and if any safety precautions are needed.
- Wear a helmet and other protective gear where appropriate.
- Ride a bicycle on designated paths and away from busy roadways. Always wear a helmet.

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- Consider informing supervisors such as lifeguards or coaches about your seizures and what to do if a seizure occurs.
- Make sure that water temperature is not too hot before entering a hot tub.
- Avoid scuba diving, rock climbing, or high-board diving.

Safety for children

When your child has seizures:

Many of the safety tips you have been reading about can help keep children safe too. As a parent, you will need to strike a balance between protecting your child and being over-protective.

Here are some other things to think about when kids have seizures:

- Consider using a seizure alert device, detection system, or other monitor to alert you when a seizure occurs.
- Avoid using bunk beds. A seizure in a top bunk could lead to a fall.
- If your child has drop seizures, a helmet may help avoid injury.
- When friends and family take care of your child, provide information on first aid for seizures and give them your seizure response plan. Put them on the refrigerator, by the phone, or in the playroom where they are easy to find.
- Make sure you send your child's seizure response plan and first aid information when they have a sleepover. People feel better when they know what to do.
- Practice seizure drills for family members so they know what to do and what not to do.
- Ask the health care provider when to call if a seizure occurs and when to call emergency services.

When a parent has seizures

You have seizures. You have a child of your own. How is this all going to work?

You cannot help but wonder. What happens if I have a seizure while taking care of the baby?

You probably already got rid of things around the house that could hurt your baby. That is a major step.

You can do more. A few simple changes and a few new habits will help.

- When holding or feeding your baby, sit on the floor. If you have a seizure, the baby will not fall far.
- Dress, change and sponge-bathe the baby on the floor, using a changing pad.
- Have the baby securely in a stroller equipped with brakes—or strapped in an infant seat—while you feed them.
- When you are home alone, use a playpen or play yard with doors and gates closed and latched.
- Keep baby supplies nearby on each level of the home.
- Avoid carrying hot fluids or dangerous items near your child.
- If your seizures are sensitive to sleep deprivation, get extra help caring for the baby at night.
- Always keep your epilepsy medicine (and other medications) where your child cannot get to them.
- When out of the house with your child, consider using a connection such as a harness on your child. This can help make sure your child does not wander off if you have a seizure.
- If you have auras before seizures, lie down on your side on a soft surface when an aura begins.
- Carry a cell phone, even in the house, to call for help when needed.
- Consider using a seizure alert device, detection system, or other monitoring device so others know when a seizure occurs.

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- If you have frequent seizures, consider having someone with you while you care for your baby.

One day, as your child grows, they may ask about your seizures. Use simple language to explain seizures. Say that you will be okay but that you may need help sometimes. Show them how to get another adult to help, or to call 911, if you do not wake up after a seizure.

If you are calm, your child will be calm.

As your child gets older, they will have more questions for you. You will want to go into more detail about what seizures are and what to do.



Photo by Andrew Branch

Getting support

If you have questions about safety and seizures, talk to your health care provider first. Local Epilepsy Foundations throughout the country can help too. They provide a variety of services and support, and may be able to put you in touch with other people who are living with epilepsy and seizures.

Learn more, connect, and get involved

Visit www.epilepsy.com or call 1-800-332-1000 to:

- Learn more about seizures and safety.
- Find resources about epilepsy.
- Find support groups and an online community for people with epilepsy.
- Locate the Epilepsy Foundation office nearest to you.

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Notes

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About the Epilepsy Foundation

The Epilepsy Foundation, a national non-profit with nearly 50 local organizations throughout the U.S., has led the fight against seizures since 1968. The Foundation is an unwavering ally for individuals and families impacted by epilepsy and seizures. The mission of the Epilepsy Foundation is to lead the fight to overcome the challenges of living with epilepsy and to accelerate therapies to stop seizures, find cures, and save lives. The Foundation works to ensure that people with seizures have the opportunity to live their lives to their fullest potential. For additional information, please visit epilepsy.com.

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