

Seizure Smart – Self Management

*Good seizure control can have a positive impact on all areas of life.
These practical tips may help you to increase seizure control and gain
better control of your life.*



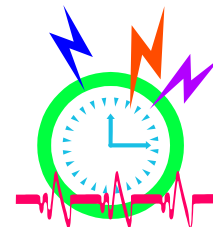
Medications

Take medications as prescribed



Anti-epileptic medications do not cure epilepsy, but they can control seizures. Most people with epilepsy who take their medications as prescribed by the doctor do not have seizures. To help remind you to remember medication every day some practical tips are suggested below:

✓ Try to make it part of a daily routine like taking them at meal times.	✓ Place the medications in a safe, visible position as a reminder.
✓ Set a watch or small alarm clock as a reminder.	✓ Use a chart or calendar and tick when the dose is taken.
✓ Consider using a pillbox or ask the Chemist to put the medications into a pill tray pack.	✓ Ask someone close to remind you.



Check with your doctor before taking other medications or supplements

Other medications may interact with anti-epileptic medications or make a person more prone to having seizures. Seek advice from your doctor before taking any new medications.

Be aware that **vomiting and diarrhoea** can also trigger seizures because medications may not be absorbed properly and the body's fluid and electrolyte imbalances can occur due to dehydration. It is important to be aware that vomiting and diarrhoea may be side effects of the anti-epileptic medications.

Complementary therapies and supplements

Some people with epilepsy have reported having seizures after taking herbal and homoeopathic medicines or supplements. Substances known to possibly increase seizure frequency include *Ginkgo Biloba*, *St Johns Wort* and *Evening Primrose Oil*. Talk to your doctor before commencing *any* of these substances or herbal medicines as these may interfere with the metabolism of anti-epileptic medications.

Caffeine: Caffeine is a stimulant and is found in coffee, tea, chocolate, many soft drinks, and medications, including some diet pills, antihistamines and decongestants.¹ There have been reported cases that *excessive amounts* of caffeine have contributed to an increase in frequency of seizures. It is also important to remember that caffeine may interact with medications.



High-energy drinks / Guarana: Guarana is a natural caffeine source and a stimulant. It is often one of the ingredients used in energy drinks and herbal "weight loss" teas and sometimes combined with adrenaline to produce an even stronger stimulant effect.

If seizure control is difficult, avoid large amounts of caffeine or switch to decaffeinated drinks

Artificial sweeteners: There is much debate and controversy over the effects of artificial sweeteners (aspartame). Opinions differ about the effects on health. Despite this, a number of people, including some with epilepsy, still think that the sweetener affects their health. “The best test is to try eliminating it from your diet, keep a diary and see if your health, or epilepsy, improves.”ⁱⁱ

Grapefruit and Seville oranges: There are substances in grapefruit that can interfere with the way the body absorbs and breaks down certain medications, increasing or decreasing its levels in the bloodstream. One of these medications affected is Carbamazepine.



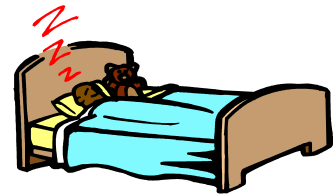
To minimise the risk of adverse effects when consuming grapefruit or its juice:

- ❑ **DO NOT** drink grapefruit juice or eat grapefruit in any form if taking Carbamazepine (Tegretol, Tegretol CR or Teril) until you have talked with your doctor or pharmacist.
- ❑ Avoid taking any medication with grapefruit juice until discussed with your doctor or pharmacist.
- ❑ Read the labels on foods and natural health products to make sure they do not contain grapefruit or its juice or Seville oranges.

Always report any adverse drug reaction to your doctor or pharmacist immediately.ⁱⁱⁱ

Lifestyle

Get enough sleep



Triggers are events or circumstances that make people who have epilepsy more likely to have a seizure. Lack of sleep is a common trigger for seizures. How much sleep each person needs is individual, but stick to a regular bedtime and try to get a full nights sleep (7-8 hours) as often as possible. People with epilepsy should not feel they need an excessive amount of sleep. Constant tiredness and sleepiness, may be a sign that medications may need adjusting. If you suffer from insomnia or overtiredness discuss the possible reasons with your doctor.



Moderation is the rule

Alcohol: There is individual variation in the effect that alcohol has on seizures. Some people with epilepsy are more affected than others. Excessive alcohol intake is known to increase the potential to have seizures.

- ❑ Most people with epilepsy can enjoy a social drink, however some medications used in seizure management do interact with alcohol. Always check with your doctor.
- ❑ Heavy or binge drinking is not recommended as it is often associated with late nights, missed meals, forgotten medications and poor sleep, which can all trigger seizures.
- ❑ Both alcohol and most anti-epileptic medications are metabolised by the liver. Prolonged excessive consumption of alcohol can cause liver problems that may alter the effectiveness of the medication.



Illegal drugs: Seizures frequently occur with recreational drug use.

- ❑ Many illegal drugs, especially stimulants such as cocaine, 'crack', PCP, ecstasy and speed (amphetamines), have the potential to cause seizures and it is uncertain what interactions these, or any illegal drugs, may have with prescription medicines.
- ❑ It is important to remember that the use of these substances is illegal in Australia.

If you have concerns regarding alcohol or other drugs that you think are affecting your seizure control discuss them with your doctor.





Identifying known seizure triggers and how to avoid them is important for gaining seizure control. Avoiding seizure triggers can at times be difficult. It is important to weigh up the risks and look at quality of life issues.

The most common seizure triggers are missed medications, drug interactions, fatigue, tiredness and stress. Examples of other triggers include;

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| low blood sugar and poor nutrition | depression |
| flashing lights or changes in geometrical patterns | anxiety |
| fever, colds or infections | boredom |
| extreme heat | dehydration and over hydration |
| extreme cold | physical exhaustion |
| hormonal fluctuations in females | change in sleeping states |
| drug toxicity (too much anti-epileptic medication) | sudden shock or extreme pain |

Recognise and respond to stress

Some stress cannot be avoided but how we respond to it can change the impact it has. Identifying the cause(s) of stress and finding practical solutions is important for all of us.

Everyone reacts differently to stress, and not all stress management techniques work for all people.

Some known stress reduction techniques are:

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| Ⓢ Muscle relaxation exercises | Ⓢ Music |
| Ⓢ Breathing techniques | Ⓢ Reading |
| Ⓢ Yoga | Ⓢ Exercise |
| Ⓢ Effective time management | Ⓢ Good support networks |



Contact the local council or community health centre for classes or contact the Epilepsy Association for information on programs aimed at enhancing social networks and providing epilepsy support.

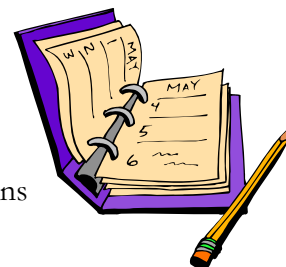
If stress is having a significant impact discuss any concerns with a professional like a psychologist or counsellor.

Keeping a seizure diary is a good way to identify possible triggers

Seizure diaries are available free from the Epilepsy Association. They can help identify seizure trigger(s), and provide a good overview of seizure frequency and presentation.

Seizure diary should include:

- ✓ Date and time of seizure(s)
- ✓ Seizure type or description
- ✓ What happened before, during and after the seizure, if known?
- ✓ Medication taken and missed that day including medication for other conditions
- ✓ Any possible triggers
- ✓ General health and energy level leading up to the seizure(s)
- ✓ Menstrual cycle for women



Most people with epilepsy agree that taking their medication regularly and simply being careful with their lifestyle minimises the chances of having a seizure

Additional information available from the Epilepsy Association

- *Alcohol and Epilepsy*
- *Basic Facts on Epilepsy*
- *Epilepsy and Photosensitivity*
- *Memory and Epilepsy*
- *Evaluating Epilepsy*
- *Guide to Medications for Epilepsy*
- *Medical Management of Epilepsy*
- *You and Your Doctor – Partners in Health Care*
- *Exploding the Myths about Epilepsy*
- *Complementary Therapies*
- *Epilepsy in the Elderly. M. R Newton*
- *Memory Loss. M. Tan*
- *Seizures After Stroke. C. F. Blydin*
- *Seizure Smart – Safety*
- *Seizure Smart – Swimming*
- *Seizure Smart – Travel*
- *Seizure Smart - Driving*

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.

ⁱ Life Extension <http://www.lef.org/protocols/prtcl-142a.shtml>

ⁱⁱ BBC Health UK http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/ask_doctor/aspartame.shtml

ⁱⁱⁱ Therapeutic Products Directorate TPD-web. Canada http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/tpd-dpt/index_e.html