

Seizures and Safety

Safety Is Key

No matter what level of impact the person with epilepsy experiences, safety is of the utmost importance. Whether around the house, at school, at work, out with friends, or even asleep in bed, keeping safe—by thinking ahead and planning ahead—can make all the difference. In this publication, we outline some easy ways that you and your loved one with epilepsy can be safe and lead a healthy and active life.

Safety & You

If you have epilepsy, you may have seizures that make you black out or fall. You're probably taking medicine to prevent them. The medicine may be working well. Or you may still be having some seizures. Most seizures will not hurt you. But you can get hurt if you have seizures in certain places. Some dangers are easy to spot, like deep water or the edge of a cliff. Some hide in places that you never think of as dangerous – like the average 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. The trick is to think and plan ahead.

Safety - Every Day

The following tips are to help you live more safely with seizures. You can use them to help you or your family live safer.

1. Make sure your family/friends know what to do when you have a seizure and when to call for help.
2. Wear a medical ID bracelet or necklace that says you have epilepsy.
3. Take your medicine on time, everyday (a pillbox may help you remember).
4. Try to get enough sleep.
5. Avoid using alcohol and illegal drugs. Both can cause seizures.
6. If you have a warning before a seizure, let someone nearby know and move to a safe place.
7. Carry a cell phone so you can contact family/friends.

Safety - Around the House

Bathrooms and kitchens have lots of risks for someone who may suddenly black out or fall. Here are some things you can do to keep you safer in both places.

In the Bathroom

1. Hang bathroom doors so they open out instead of in. Your family will be able to open the door if have a seizure and fall against it.
2. Leave the bathroom door unlocked so people can get in to help if you have a seizure.
3. Check that the shower drain is working. You don't want to fall in a pool of water. A shower tub seat with a safety strap may help, too. Non-skid strips in the tub make standing safer.
4. Check how the hot water is when you shower or bathe. Don't set it so hot that it could burn you if you blacked out while the water is running.

5. Put padding and bathroom carpeting on the floor. A softer surface is safer if you fall.
6. Hang an "Occupied" sign on the outside handle of the bathroom door, instead of locking it.

In the Kitchen

1. Use a microwave for most of your cooking.
2. Use the stove only when someone else is home. Serve hot things directly from the stove onto plates.
3. Use plastic or paper plates and drinking cups instead of china or glass. The plastic or paper dishes won't cut you if you have a seizure. Use cups with lids so you don't get burns from spilling hot liquids.
4. If you have to take food out of the oven, use long, heavy oven mitts.
5. Carve meat or poultry with a regular knife, not an electric one or an electric slicer.

In and around the home

1. If you mow the lawn, use a mower with a "dead man's handle." That's the kind of mower that stops running if you stop holding the handle.
2. If you use a circular saw or other kind of electric-powered saw, make sure it has hand protection. Make sure it stops when you stop holding it.
3. Put padding around tables and other furniture with sharp edges. Catalogs for baby and toddler supplies offer special padding in many shapes and sizes.
4. Don't carry lighted candles around the house or put them where you could knock them over during a seizure.
5. Don't carry hot ashes from the fireplace through the house.
6. At barbecues, ask someone else to do the grilling.

Safety - On the Road

1. Don't drive unless you have a valid license.
2. Don't drive if you've been having seizures.
3. If you can't drive because you're still having seizures, see if there are any special bus or taxi services for people with disabilities.
4. If you choose to ride a bike, protect yourself with a helmet, knee pads and elbow pads. Keep to side roads as much as you can.
5. If you're waiting for a bus or a subway train, stand back from the road or the edge of the subway platform so you don't get hurt if you fall.
6. If you have seizures often and can't get around any other way, a taxi may be the best choice. Your safety is worth the extra cost.
7. Stay away from long steep escalators. Take an elevator instead.

Safety Help from Others

The best way to stay safe during a seizure is to make sure other people know how to help you. If you have seizures that makes you fall and shake, tell them to:

1. Help you to the floor.

2. Put something soft and flat under your head.
3. Remove your eye glasses and loosen tight clothing.
4. Turn you gently on one side so you won't choke.
5. Move sharp object out of your way.
6. Be friendly and helpful when you wake up.
7. Time your seizure.

Tell them:

1. NOT to hold you down or restrain you.
2. NOT to grab hold or shout at you.
3. NOT to put anything in your mouth.
4. NOT to panic!

If you have the kind of seizures where you black out, tell them to:

1. Stay calm and speak to you quietly.
2. Move things that could hurt you out of the way.
3. Be friendly and helpful when you know where you are again.
4. Time the seizure.

Do you want your family and friends to call 911 every time you have a seizure? Or would you like them to wait a few minutes to see whether you are going to be all right? (Most seizures end after a couple of minutes.) See what your doctor says. Ask whether you need to go to the emergency room every time you have a seizure.

Your friends and family should know to call 911 if:

1. You don't start breathing normally after the seizure.
2. You've been hurt in some way.
3. You had the seizure in water.
4. Your seizure lasted more than 5 minutes.
5. You had another seizure right after the first one and are not regaining consciousness.
6. You're a woman and you're pregnant.
7. You have diabetes, or another kind of serious illness.

Safety Outdoors

1. When you exercise, take lots of breaks. Try to stay cool.
2. Taking up a new sport? Get to know the sport ahead of time. Ask yourself: would I get hurt doing this if I blacked out?
3. The buddy system is best for skiing and swimming safely. You may need extra help if you have a seizure on a snowy mountain or in a pool.
4. Maybe you like contact sports. If you wear a helmet to protect your head, they may be fine. But talk to your doctor first.

Safety for Kids

Many of the safety tips you've been reading about can help keep children safe, too. But there are some other things to think about when kids have seizures.

1. Use a baby monitor. It can help you hear if your child has a seizure in his room.
2. Closely supervise showers and tub baths.
3. If your child has seizures of any kind, stay away from bunk beds. A seizure in a top bunk could cause a child to fall.
4. If your child has drop seizures, a helmet and face guard may keep him from being hurt.
5. When friends or family watch your child, post a list of first aid tips where they're easy to see. Put them on the refrigerator, by the phone, or in the playroom.
6. Make sure you send the list with your child when he has a sleep over, too. People feel better when they know what to do.
7. Not every childhood injury is preventable whether or not a child has seizures. Try to strike a balance between safety and over protection.

When a parent has seizures

You have seizures. You have a child of your own. How is this all going to work? You can't help but wonder. What happens if I have a seizure while taking care of a baby? You've probably already got rid of things around the house that could hurt your baby. That's a major step.

There's much more you can do. A few simple changes, a few new habits will help.

1. When feeling your baby, sit on the floor. If you have a seizure, the baby will not fall.
2. You can dress, change and sponge-bath the baby on the floor using a changing pad.
3. Having the baby snug in a stroller or steady infant seat while you feed him/her is another way to keep the baby safe.
4. When you're home alone, keep the baby in the playpen or play yard.
5. Always keep your epilepsy medicine (and other meds) where your child can't get at them.

One day, as your child grows, he/she may ask about your seizures. Use words he/she can understand. Tell your child that you will be okay but you may need help sometimes. Show your child how to get another adult to help, or to call 911 if you don't wake up after a seizure. If you're calm, your child will be too. As your child gets older, he/she will have more questions for you. And you'll want to go into more detail about what seizures are and how your child can help. The important thing to remember is that life doesn't just stop because of seizures. Life goes on. And with a little planning, it will go on safely for you and your family.

NOTE: Living with epilepsy can be very individual and there may be other safety tips and precautions that apply to you in a particular way. Please discuss safety and seizures with your doctor.