

## Seizures and Safety

### 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 appropriate seizure first aid 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 (setting alarms or having a pillbox can help).
4. Try to get enough sleep. Sleep hygiene is important.
5. Avoid using alcohol and illegal drugs. Both can trigger seizures.
6. If you have an aura/warning, let someone nearby know and move to a safe place.
7. Carry a cell phone so you can contact family/friends.
8. Talk to your doctor or other health care providers about how you can make your home safer for people living with epilepsy.

### 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. Take showers instead of baths.
2. Use safety glass for mirrors and shower doors.
3. 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.
4. Leave the bathroom door unlocked so people can get in to help if you have a seizure.
5. 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.
6. Check how the hot water is when you shower. Don't set it so hot that it could burn you if you blacked out while the water is running.
7. Put padding and bathroom carpeting on the floor. A softer surface is safer if you fall.
8. Hang an "Occupied" sign on the outside handle of the bathroom door, instead of locking it.

### *In the Kitchen*

1. Use a microwave instead of stovetop when you're home alone.
2. When using the stove use the back burners
3. Use the stove only when someone else is home. Serve hot things directly from the stove onto plates.
4. Try not to carry hot dishes, try sliding them along a counter or using a cart.
5. 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 unbreakable dishes).
6. Use cups with lids so you don't get burns from spilling hot liquids.
7. If you must take food out of the oven, use long, heavy oven mitts.
8. Carve meat or poultry with a regular knife, not an electric one or an electric slicer.
9. Use a food processor and chopper instead of using knives.
10. Use chairs with armrests to help prevent falls.

### *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. Make sure someone is nearby when you use the stove, grills, or fireplace.
7. Iron clothes or light candles only when someone is with you.
8. Look for appliances that have automatic shut-off switches.
9. Put guards in front of radiators, heaters, and fireplaces. Only use space heaters that can't tip over.
10. Check your smoke alarms once a month by pushing the test button.
11. Avoid glass tables

### **Keeping Yourself Safe While Sleeping**

1. Sleep with a bed that is low to the ground or mattress on the floor if you have seizures at night.
  2. Consider using a seizure alert devices/monitors so someone can hear if you have a seizure.
  3. If you have shaking/convulsive movements during your seizure, move your bed away from furniture so you don't injure yourself.
  4. Move bed against wall to avoid falling.
  5. Sleep on your side or back, avoid sleeping face down.
  6. Use a breathable, anti-suffocation pillow.
  7. Limit the number of pillows on your bed.
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8. Remove sharp or potentially dangerous items from around your bed (e.g., glass lamps).
9. Install wall-to-wall carpet or soft flooring when possible to cushion a potential fall.
10. Try to avoid clutter in rooms to allow space for a safe fall.
11. Secure televisions, computers, or other things that could fall off tables.

## Safety - On the Road

1. Find out about your state's laws regarding driving and epilepsy.
2. Don't drive unless you have a valid license.
3. Don't drive if you've been having seizures. If you can't drive because you're still having seizures, see if there are any special buses, 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 or ride sharing services like Uber or Lyft, might may be the best choice. Your safety and the safety of others is worth the extra cost.
7. Stay away from long steep escalators. Take an elevator instead.

## Safety + First Aid

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. Stay with the person and start timing the seizure. Remain calm and check for medical alert bracelet or card.
2. Keep the person safe. Move or guide away from harmful objects.
3. Turn the person onto their side if they are not awake and aware. Don't block airway, put something small and soft under the head, loosen tight clothes around the neck.
4. Do not put anything in their mouth. Don't give water, pills or food until the person is awake.
5. Do not restrain.
6. Stay with them until they are awake and alert after the seizure. Most seizures end in a few minutes.

Epilepsy affects everyone differently. Most seizures end after a couple of minutes and are not considered medical emergencies. An ambulance should be called when...

Your friends and family should know to call 911 if:

1. Seizures lasts longer than 5 minutes.
  2. Repeated seizures.
  3. Difficulty breathing.
  4. Seizure occurs in water.
  5. Person is injured, pregnant or sick.
  6. Person does not return to their usual state.
  7. First time seizure.
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## 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.

## Exercise Safety

1. Recruit s buddy to exercise with you.
2. Bike or walk with friends and avoid busy streets. Make sure that everyone is wearing a helmet while bike riding.
3. If doing an outdoor activity, take a cell phone with GPS locator with you.
4. Take frequent breaks and drink plenty of fluids.
5. Wear a medical alert bracelet and carry a medical alert card.

## 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. If heat is a trigger, wear a cooling vest, relax in shaded areas and stay hydrated.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. 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 feeding your baby, sit on the floor or in the middle of the bed or couch to support the baby more easily. 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.
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4. When you're home alone, keep the baby in the playpen or use a small stroller to carry a baby around the house or outside.
5. Always keep your epilepsy medicine (and other meds) where your child can't get at them.
6. Keep baby supplies on each level of the home to avoid climbing stairs.
7. Don't carry hot liquid or dangerous items near the baby.
8. If your seizures are sensitive to sleep deprivation, use help to feed the baby at night.
9. When walking outside with a child who can wander, consider using a safety harness to keep your child close in case you have a seizure.
10. If you feel a warning or a seizure, let others know, get to a safe place and lie down on your side on a soft surface.
11. If your child is old enough, teach them seizure first aid and discuss the plan of action.

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.

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