

People with epilepsy should be aware that seizures can pose certain risks. No matter what type of epilepsy you have, a seizure can threaten your safety if it happens in the wrong environment.

Being aware of potential risks for you means you can do your best to reduce them.

## Safety factors to consider

There are many types of seizures and they affect people in different ways. The risk of injury due to seizures varies greatly and can depend upon:

- The type of seizures. Prolonged or severe seizures, clusters of seizures or frequent falls are more likely to cause injury and can be life threatening.
- How often seizures occur. More seizures usually mean greater risk.
- Age. Seniors, children and infants are more susceptible to injuries or accidents.
- Medications. Some medication unwanted side effects such as drowsiness, double vision and poor coordination can increase risks.
- High-risk activities. Activities like swimming, cycling, water sports and rock climbing are obviously going to be risky if seizures are not controlled. Some activities will always require a companion. Think about the consequences of a seizure and possible injuries before engaging in an activity and have a plan if a seizure occurs.
- Known seizure triggers. Commonly reported triggers include fatigue, lack of sleep, stress, alcohol and heat. Recognising your seizure triggers will help you to avoid them as much as you can.
- Other physical and neurological issues

**Safety precautions should be sensible and relevant to that person, whilst balancing risk and restrictions**

## Practical suggestions:

- Ensure friends, family and colleagues know what to do if you have a seizure
- Medic-Alert bracelets or cards are a good idea if you have poor seizure control, especially if seizures are likely to occur in public
- Emergency response alarms may be useful for people living alone
- Avoid substances that may affect your medications or seizures, such as excessive caffeine or alcohol, high energy drinks and illegal drugs
- Speak to your doctor or pharmacist about any other medications or supplements you may be taking.



**Potential accidents, risks and injuries can include:**

- |                          |                                   |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Cuts abrasions, bruising | Accidental overdose of medication |
| Burns                    | Suffocation                       |
| Drowning                 | SUDEP                             |
| Broken bones and teeth   |                                   |

**Caution**

**Some measures that may help you to lessen the chance of injury or accidents**

**1) To reduce the likelihood of cuts/abrasions/bruising:**

- Reduce clutter, sharp or jutting edges and corners around the home.
- Use a shower curtain rather than a glass screen. Use a shower chair if you think it will help.
- Any glass doors should be reinforced or apply safety film to existing glass.
- Use non-breakable crockery
- Use cordless electrical appliances with automatic off switch.
- Wear rubber gloves to wash dishes.
- When loading a dishwasher, position points and sharp edges downwards.
- Reduce your use of knives by buying pre-sliced food when possible.
- Use an electric shaver rather than a razor.

**2) To prevent burns:**

- Have temperature control or a thermostat on your hot water systems, spas and heaters
- Avoid lightweight and free-standing heaters. Wall-mounted heaters or central heating are preferable.
- Place fixed safety guards around the fireplace.
- Where possible use a hand-held shower and always turn the cold water on first and off last.
- It is preferable to use a microwave rather than a stove or conventional oven.
- Use the back elements of a stove and turn pot handles away when cooking.
- Avoid carrying hot dishes of food or liquid by serving meals from the kitchen bench.
- Do not light candles or fires when alone.

**3) To prevent drowning:**

- Never swim alone.
- Wear an approved life jacket for water activities, including boating and fishing.
- Avoid water sports such as scuba and high-board diving.
- Showering is recommended. Use a shower chair if necessary.
- If you only have a bath, use a hand-held shower attachment and leave the plug out.
- Do not shower or bathe while alone in the house, if possible.
- Always supervise children in the bath and around water.
- If seizures occur at regular times, shower at a time when seizures are less likely to happen.
- Preferably have bathroom doors that are outward opening, sliding, half doors or doors that are easily removed, and always leave bathroom doors unlocked.
- If you do have a bath, turn the taps off before getting into the bath.



**There is a risk around water if a seizure happens. Use common sense around areas such as spas, water gardens, fountains, fish ponds and baths.**

**4) To reduce the risk of serious injuries:**

- Avoid high-risk activities such as hang gliding or rock climbing without a harness and risky endeavours at home such as climbing ladders, particularly if you are home alone.
- Always wear a helmet when riding a bicycle, scooter, horse, or when rollerblading or skateboarding.
- Choose a low bed and avoid sleeping on a top bunk.
- Stand well back from a road or platform edge when waiting for a bus, tram or train.
- Avoid living in accommodation with stairs.
- Carpeted floors are better than tiles or floorboards in the home and are less slippery and a less likely chance of fall related injuries.
- An alarm may help alert others to seizures at night e.g. seizure mat, baby monitor or intercom.

**5) Suffocation**

- Try to sleep with a flat pillow or use a firm porous pillow. There are pillows available that are manufactured specifically for the purposes of anti-suffocation. They appear to allow more airflow.
- Don't use more than one pillow.
- Choose a low wide bed that has a firm mattress.
- A seizure- alarm may help alert others to seizures at night.

**6) Accidental overdose of antiseizure medication:**

- All medications should be locked away in a cool, dry place, out of reach of children and not left in pockets or handbags. If a dose is missed, the next dose should be taken as normal. Do not double the dose.
- Discuss possible medication reactions with the pharmacist or your doctor before taking any other prescription or over-the-counter medications.
- Don't make changes to your medication without speaking to your doctor.
- Use a diary, pill box or chemist tray pack to ensure that medications are taken as prescribed.

## Poison information 13 11 26

**7) SUDEP**

Sudden Unexpected Death in Epilepsy (SUDEP) is when a person with epilepsy dies suddenly, prematurely and where no reason for death is found. People living with epilepsy are at a 1 in a 1000 risk of SUDEP per year. This risk varies depending on your seizures, for example:

- The risk increases if you have tonic-clonic seizures, especially if they happen at night or when asleep
- The more frequent the tonic-clonic seizures, the higher the risk
  - Although SUDEP is more common in people with frequent seizures, it has also occurred in people who have had very few seizures.
- Go through the [SUDEP and Safety Checklist](#) with your doctor or epilepsy nurse to help determine your risk.

**Knowing about risks means you can take action and attempt to prevent them.**



In summary, the steps you can take to reduce seizure related risks, injury or death are:

- Get the best seizure control possible
- Take your medication as prescribed
- Avoid any of your known seizure triggers
- Avoid drinking too much alcohol
- Get enough sleep
- Be healthy
- Manage stress
- Know when your seizures are most likely to occur
- Make sure those close to you know what to do in case of a seizure
- Speak to your doctor if you are not happy with your current medication or side effects
- Regular reviews with your doctor



### **Seizures during sleep**

Many families have concerns for the safety of their loved ones with epilepsy while they are asleep. This is particularly so for parents of young children and families of people living alone. Family or parents often stay awake watching for seizures, but this practice only creates tiredness and dysfunction in the whole household. Some suggestions to help overcome this concern are to:

- Place a baby monitor in the persons or child's bedroom to hear any abnormal noises (monitors are available from most stores).
- Try a seizure mat or seizure alarm that detects movement in bed during a tonic-clonic seizure. If the person lives alone, choose one (such as a smart watch) that can alert others elsewhere.
- There are many seizure alert devices available. Of course, no device can be guaranteed effective all of the time, but it might provide some reassurance to people with epilepsy and their loved ones.

### **Living alone**

Living alone may or may not be a lifestyle choice. A common concern for people whose seizures are not fully controlled is that they may sustain an injury or life-threatening situation if they have a seizure.

Some people ask family or neighbours to either phone, drop in or watch for unusual behaviour (e.g. curtains closed in daytime, lights off at night).

There are many alarms available that can help; ranging from telephone alarms, smart watches, personal alarms, fall alarms and daily calls. Some products can detect movement, breathing or heart rate. These products can notify emergency assistance or family members should a seizure occur. There are a large variety of options available. Costs and service types vary.



### **Living Alone** continued....

It is a good idea to consult an occupational therapist for advice about safe design when planning modifications or renovations, particularly of the bathroom or kitchen.

### **Medical identification**

People commonly call an ambulance if they witness someone having a seizure because they are not sure of what to do. This is not always necessary and can prove to be inconvenient for the person with epilepsy, mainly due to long waits in casualty and ambulance costs. Although not everyone wishes to do so, wearing a medical ID bracelet or pendant may help prevent this.

If a seizure occurs in public or with strangers, a medical ID bracelet or pendant will alert people you have epilepsy. This can reduce panic, make it more likely you receive appropriate help and prevent unnecessary ambulance call-outs.

Some seizures may look to others as if the person is intoxicated, and people with epilepsy can be questioned about their behaviour by police or taken to a police station. Others are either confronted or avoided by members of the public.

### **Further Information**

For more about different safety and identification products available, have a look at our [Products Page](#).

[Epilepsy and Risk](#)

[SUDEP and Safety Checklist](#) (to go through with your doctor or epilepsy nurse)

[A Guide to Safety](#)