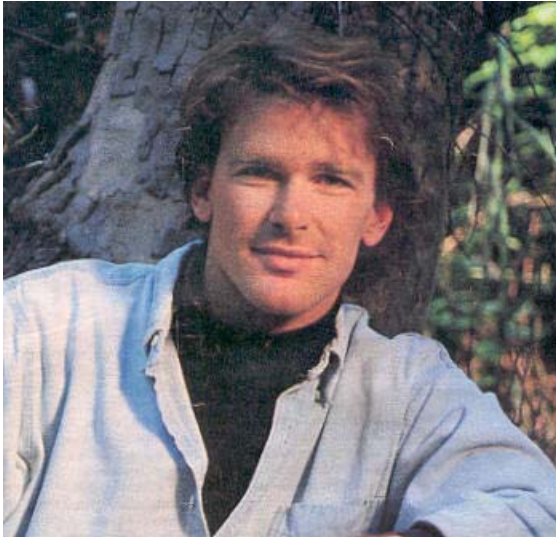


EPILEPSY

Men Managing Epilepsy or Seizure Disorder



This document provides general information about epilepsy and seizure disorders.

This information should not be taken as medical advice -- only your doctor can give the medical advice that is right for you.



**EPILEPSY AND
SEIZURE
ASSOCIATION
OF MANITOBA**

Are you a man with epilepsy or a seizure disorder?

Do you wonder how it will affect your life?

Don't Worry!

Epilepsy or a seizure disorder does not have to be all you think about. The more you learn about epilepsy or seizure disorders and actively cope with it, the less it will be a concern in your life. You may have to make some alterations to your daily routine, but in the end you can still live your life!

Taking your Medication

Men with epilepsy or a seizure disorder sometimes feel they can “tough it out”. Some may even deny they have epilepsy. Following your doctor’s advice is the best way to increase your independence. Your doctor knows the best way for treating you. You must work with your doctor to learn how to control your seizures. **Taking your medication, as prescribed, means:**

- ❖ Do not miss pills.
- ❖ Do not reduce your dosage.
- ❖ Do not stop taking your pills.

Stopping your medication without talking to your doctor can be dangerous. You can have a seizure – a sudden, breakthrough seizure - just when you think everything is under control. It can happen almost immediately or quite a while after you miss or stop your pills. As a result, your seizures may be more difficult to treat than before.

Driving

Now that you have seizures will you be able to drive? Yes, under certain conditions. The main concern is safety, for you and others. Uncontrolled seizures and driving don't mix. If your seizures aren't well controlled, you can take the bus, ask a friend for a ride, or even join a car pool.

Laws about driving

Across Canada, two regulations for drivers with epilepsy or a seizure disorder will apply in all Canadian provinces and territories:

1. By law, doctors must report to the Ministry of Transportation any medical condition that may interfere with their ability to drive safely.
2. People with epilepsy must have their seizures controlled with or without medication for a specific time.

You can drive if:

- ❖ You are totally seizure free.
- ❖ You are taking your medication and are not having seizures.
- ❖ You are not sleepy or tired.

If you drive against medical advice, you may be liable for accidents – even if they are not your fault.

While driving, if you feel a seizure coming on...

- ❖ Pull over to the side of the road.
- ❖ Ask someone to drive.

If your medication is changed...

- ❖ Wait before driving until you and your doctor know how it will affect you.

**Never drink and drive.
Alcohol increases the risk of seizures.**

Work

If you are qualified for a job, this condition shouldn't keep you from getting it. Seizures are brief and don't usually interfere with work performance.



A few jobs have some restrictions, for safety reasons. Sometimes it may be hard even impossible for you to do the following jobs, especially if your seizures are not under control:

- Transportation and professional driver
- Construction Worker
- Surgeon
- Dentist
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police: Each man is assessed on an individual basis by a doctor
- Firefighters and policemen

If you are turned down for a job, do not give up!

Discrimination and your Rights

Sadly, discrimination against men with epilepsy or a seizure disorder does happen sometimes, mostly because there is little intelligence and misconception. Most jobs fall under the jurisdiction of provinces and territories, all rules and laws for employment differ across Canada. Here are some reasons to appeal to your provincial or federal human rights commission for help against discrimination:

- The employer has more severe job requirements for you than others because of your epilepsy or seizure disorder.
- The employer makes a distinction between you and other workers
- The employer fires or refuses to hire you because of your eligibility for pension or insurance plans.
- The employer refuses you a job, based on a prognosis of a medical condition.

Canada Pension Plan Disability Benefits

Most men are able to work but some cannot. If your disorder prevents you from working, you may be eligible for the Canadian Pension Plan Disability. This federal plan pays a monthly benefit to people who are unable to work.

Life Insurance

For men living with this condition, it's harder to get life insurance. Some companies refuse to insure you. Others accept your business but at higher premiums.

Your Appearance

Your medication can change your physical appearance. Weight changes, rash, acne, gum overgrowth, subtle tremors, hair loss or thinning or excessive hair growth are side effects of some medications. If you are uncomfortable with these changes, ask your doctor to adjust your medication.

How you feel

Since epilepsy or a seizure disorder affects the way your brain works, it can affect the way you feel. As well as your medication which can cause irritability, mood changes or tiredness. Life with this condition can be difficult. At times you may feel anxious, angry, and sometimes depressed. Accepting and learning how to deal with them are the only things to do. With support from your family and friends, you can do it! Asking for help is a sign of strength not weakness.

Violence

Does epilepsy make you more violent or aggressive during or after a seizure? Not likely, during a seizure, it's extremely rare for a man with epilepsy to become violent. Sudden acts may seem violent and even hurt someone accidentally, but it is almost impossible for you to directly hurt someone during a seizure.

After a seizure, you may feel confused, act more aggressively without remembering afterward. If you have a history of being aggressive after a seizure, tell the people around you, so they will know how to react and not try to restrain you.

Love

Accepting yourself and your condition is important before you have an intimate relationship with another person. As you and your partner get to know each other better, a time will come when you have to talk about your epilepsy or seizure disorder. You're the only person who can decide when the time is right. It all depends on how comfortable you are with your epilepsy. Talking about this is something you will have to do. You may have fears, worries and questions about how epilepsy will change your life, and so does your partner. Expressing emotions is not easy for everyone.

Talking comfortably about your condition may be hard at first, but it gets easier over time.

Sex

There's a good chance that seizures will not affect your sexual performance, especially if your seizures are controlled well. But epilepsy can influence sexuality, depending on where seizures originate in your brain.

Some parietal lobe seizures can but rarely, cause erections, ejaculation and sexual feelings. Mainly seizures are due to abnormal activity in another area of the brain.

Sexual activity is very unlikely to trigger seizures - this only happens in rare cases. A good sexual life is part of feeling good. It can reduce stress, creating better conditions for seizure control.

Will I have any sexual problems?

Although epilepsy or a seizure disorder usually has little impact on men's sexuality, anti-epileptic drugs can have sexual side effects and impotence. More often, they lead to a low sexual drive.

If you are in a relationship, you should discuss this issue with your partner, as they may feel rejected if your sexual desire has diminished.

Sexual Dysfunction

Don't be embarrassed to face a sexual problem, they affect any man. If you are having sexual difficulties, don't automatically assume it's your condition or your medication. You can improve this condition but ask your doctor who will have the proper solution, such as a change in medication or prescription for anti-impotence drugs.

Thinking of Having a Family?

As fathers, men with epilepsy or a seizure disorder are good as any other. A lot of men planning to have a child wonder if their condition will be passed on to their child. This is very unlikely to happen.

Child Safety

Having seizures is not a barrier to safely raising children. You just have to take some precautions. Here are a few safety tips:

- ◆ When feeding the baby, sit on the floor. If you always fall on the same side during a seizure, position yourself to prevent you from falling on the baby.
- ◆ Teach older children how to care for the baby during seizures.
- ◆ You can dress; change and sponge bath a baby on the floor. Don't bath the baby in a tub, if you're alone.
- ◆ Fix safety brakes on the baby's stroller, so it won't roll away, if you have a seizure while out.
- ◆ If you have an infant, catch up on sleep, whenever possible. Fatigue can trigger a seizure.

Sports

There is no reason as to why your epilepsy will keep you from playing sports - as long as you take some precautions. An active lifestyle benefits everyone and men with epilepsy are the same. Exercise on a regular basis brings better sleep and decreases stress—improving seizure control.



Before you get involved in a sport, think about the following:

- ✓ The type, severity and frequency of your seizures.
- ✓ Your known seizure triggers, e.g. stress, excitement... In some cases, playing sports can trigger seizures, possibly through hyperventilation.
- ✓ The presence of an aura before a seizure.
- ✓ The risks of playing the sports.
- ✓ How much supervision is available?

Here are some tips for Sportsmen:

- Talk to your doctor before you begin a new sport, especially if it has risk.
- Tell your coach and teammates about your condition.
- Play sports with a friend who knows about seizures and your first-aid needs.
- Always wear protective equipment.

Leisure and Social Life

You may have to choose your activities more carefully, but your choices still depend on your interests. You are going to have to consider how you act during a seizure and how it affects your safety. If you like an activity, ask yourself if you can do it safely.



Photosensitivity

Photosensitivity is a condition that makes people with epilepsy react to natural and artificial lights, leading to a seizure. Video games, flashing lights or sunlight reflecting on wet surfaces triggers photosensitive seizures. The most common trigger is television. Only 3% – 5% of all people with epilepsy are photosensitive.

If you are photosensitive follow these tips:

Television

- Watch TV a good distance away from the set.
- Watch TV in a well-lit room.
- Use a remote control.
- If you have to approach the television cover one eye with the palm of your hand.

Computers

A very low scan frequency can trigger seizures in photosensitive men.

Video Games

Most men that are photosensitive are affected by the patterns in some video games. If you play video games and are photosensitive:

- Read all instructions and warnings on your game packs.
- If you are tired, stop playing.
- Take frequent breaks and rest between games.
- Quit playing if you feel dizzy or have blurred vision.

Nightclubs

Stroboscopes and lights flashing at a certain speed can possibly trigger a seizure. If you feel a seizure coming on, try to cover one eye with your hand.

Cinema

It is not likely for a movie to trigger a seizure but it can happen during scenes with flashing lights.

Travel Tips

- ❖ Plan to carry extra medication and prescriptions.
- ❖ Get enough sleep before and during your trip. A lack of sleep and jet lag can trigger a seizure.
- ❖ Find out what your travel insurance will pay, if you have to see a doctor in another country.
- ❖ Wear an epilepsy or seizure disorder ID bracelet or necklace.
- ❖ Make sure you take your medication at regular intervals when traveling through different time zones.
- ❖ Take your insurance card and the names and phone numbers of your doctor and pharmacist with you.
- ❖ Carry medicines in your handbag or carry on luggage. Keep your pills in their bottles.
- ❖ Ask your doctor if immunization shots can interfere with your medication.

Ask your doctor for the chemical or generic name of your medication because the drugs you take may have different trade names in different countries.

Alcohol

Some men with epilepsy or a seizure disorder can drink alcohol in moderation without increasing the risk of a seizure. For others, the smallest amount of alcohol triggers a seizure almost every time – so they **must** avoid drinking completely.

Determining whether to drink or not is a personal issue. The decision depends on what type of medication you are taking.

Drinking alcohol along with medication can worsen the effects of alcohol and side effects of anti-epileptic drugs. Alcohol can make your medication less effective.

Heavy drinking is never a smart idea. Binge drinking is likely to lead to a seizure and more likely to make you forget to take your medication. Changes in lifestyle that sometimes come along with drinking may affect your seizure threshold. Sleep deprivation and late nights, missed meals and forgetting pills are seizure triggers for many men.

You should discuss with your doctor if drinking is for you. Your doctor is the best person to know what can happen if you drink alcohol while taking a certain type of medication. With all this information you can make a well-informed decision.

Drugs and Seizures

Marijuana: There is no conclusive evidence that marijuana provokes seizures. Some people think it helps to control certain types of seizures - if taken in moderation - while others say the opposite - that it may trigger a seizure.

Ecstasy: Taking ecstasy increases the amount of some chemicals in the brain that causes overstimulation. It can provoke seizures. Ecstasy is often taken while dancing all night long, leading to dehydration and making seizures more likely to occur.

Heroin: Heroin can cause seizures.

Amphetamines (speed, pep pills, and uppers): At abnormally high doses, these drugs can trigger seizures. Side effects such as lack of sleep, increases the risk of seizures.

Cocaine: It causes seizures, lack of sleep, poor nutrition and missed medication.

Solvents: They cause brain damage, leading to or worsening epilepsy or seizure disorder.

Steroids: There's no evidence these drugs lead to seizures.

Tobacco: Smoking doesn't seem to trigger seizures. However, nicotine preparations intended to help you quit smoking can cause convulsions.

Caffeine: Drinking coffee, tea or soft drinks, as part of everyday life does not usually cause seizures. However, for a small number of people caffeine can be a trigger.

***Any drug can interfere with your medication. If you take some of these drugs it should be discussed with your doctor. ***

Safety at Home

Most seizures won't hurt you but there is some risk of injury when they occur in certain places or during certain activities. Some hazards are obvious – in the water or heights – but some are in places you don't suspect – bathroom or kitchens. These dangers are not something to fear; they are something to prevent. Often minor adjustments reduce the risk of injuries. Just think ahead!

General safety tips:

- Pad tables and furniture to cover sharp edges.
- Forced air heating instead of exposed elements, such as radiators, reduce the chances of injuring yourself if you fall.

Bathroom safety:

- Leave the bathroom door unlocked so people can enter if you need help.
- Take showers rather than baths. They reduce the risk of having a seizure in water and drowning.
- Use a shower seat or tub with non-skid strips to prevent falling in case of seizure.

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- Put padding and bathroom carpeting on the floor.
 - Turn cold water on first, adding the hot gradually. Adjust the water temperature, so it's not hot enough to cause burns if a seizure or blackout occurs.

Medication Safety

Always ensure to re-order (and get from the pharmacy) required seizure medication one week before running out.

If do you run out of pills...

- Ask someone to drive you to the pharmacy.
- Get your prescription delivered.
- Ask a friend to pick up your prescription.

Kitchen safety

- Microwave cooking is safer than using an electric or gas stove.
- If you use a stove, use the back burners as often as possible.
- Use unbreakable plates and drinking cups, instead of glass or porcelain.
- Serve hot meals directly onto plates from saucepans or frying pans on the stove rather than carrying hot pans to the table.



Safety tips for the handyman

- Use a lawn mower that stops running if you stop holding the handle.
- Use power tools with hand protection and that stop automatically when you aren't holding them.

- Wear protection gear.
- Avoid heights.
- Fire is dangerous. It may be safer to let someone else light fires and to clean ashes from a fireplace. Ask someone else to grill food on the BBQ. If you have to weld, wear a mask. Never work with fire alone.

Everyone faces limits of some kind for different reasons. Change your perspective, and you'll find obstacles become challenges – defining what you can and cannot do.
Take control.
Don't let epilepsy get in the way of a satisfying life.

References:

Epilepsy Foundation web site
(<http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org/>)

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Epilepsy and Seizure Association of Manitoba

One of the major goals of the Association is education. There are over 23,000 Manitobans, of all ages, with epilepsy or seizure disorders. Here are some of the services we provide:

- Free information packages
- School awareness programs
 - Community education
 - Print and video library
- Peer support networks/ individual advocacy
 - Provincial and national newsletters
 - Website: www.manitobaepilepsy.org

If you have any further questions and/or would like to discuss your epilepsy or seizure disorder with our Association, please feel free to contact us.

For more information
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