

This factsheet looks at how exercise can help your overall health and wellbeing and how this may also help your epilepsy.

How much can our lifestyle impact on our health?

Exercise is not just about losing weight. It can improve mood and relieve stress. As stress can be a common trigger of seizures in some people, exercise may help to prevent seizures for these individuals.

Exercise releases ‘feel good’ hormones into the brain, helps to keep your muscles active, decreases fat levels in the body and increases oxygen flow to your brain. It can also increase your bone density which can help to prevent osteoporosis (where bones become fragile and are more likely to break).

Some people with epilepsy may be fearful of taking part in exercise in case they hurt themselves during a seizure, or they may feel too tired to exercise due to seizures or from the side effects of their medication.

What type of exercise should I be doing?

Exercise does not have to mean joining a gym or running in the park – walking is one of the easiest and safest exercises that most people can take part in. Gardening or relaxing activities such as tai chi can be good too. In fact, it is thought that low impact exercises such as these are the most beneficial in terms of mood and wellbeing, as they generate beneficial biochemical changes without these benefits then being used up during vigorous activity. The key is to find the exercise that feels right for you. Some people may worry that doing vigorous exercise will cause a seizure to happen. However, most sports, including contact sports like football, hockey, basketball and rugby, have not shown to increase the chance of someone having a seizure but contact sports may come with an increased risk of head injuries.

Research in the USA has shown that people

with epilepsy exercise less than those without epilepsy. Some specific diseases that can be linked to a lack of exercise, as well as poor diet and being overweight, include cardiovascular disease (which can lead to heart attacks and strokes), type 2 diabetes, hypertension (high blood pressure), osteoporosis and certain cancers. These factors can also be linked to increases in depression and anxiety. People with epilepsy are at an increased risk of developing most of these conditions, so being active and maintaining a healthy diet could be beneficial to your overall health.

A study in Norway of women who had uncontrolled epilepsy, showed that regular sessions of aerobic exercise (for example running, walking, swimming, cycling) for 60 minutes, twice a week, for 15 weeks resulted in a significant reduction in the number of seizures they had. This was associated with a reduction in health complaints such as muscle pains, sleep problems and fatigue, and with reduced levels of cholesterol and improved use of oxygen in the body. Team sports, or group activities such as a walking or gardening groups, can also be a good way of increasing self-confidence and can be a way to make new friends and help with any feelings of isolation.


Even if you find it hard to do exercise, there are many ways that you can adapt your diet to help you to feel healthier, sleep better and have more energy.

→ Visit www.nhs.uk/change4life for help on how to make small changes and get more active.

To become an associate member call 01494 601 402 or email members@epilepsysociety.org.uk
For a fundraising pack call 01494 601 300 or email fundraising@epilepsysociety.org.uk

Epilepsy Information Services
National Society for Epilepsy
Chesham Lane, Chalfont St. Peter, Bucks SL9 0RJ
www.epilepsysociety.org.uk

Epilepsy Helpline
01494 601 400 (national call rate)
Monday – Friday 10am – 4pm
(Translation service available)



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