

epilepsy
society

safety

Keeping safe at home





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When you see this symbol, it means further information is available.

Call us for a large print version

helpline

01494 601 400

Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm
(national call rate)

keeping safe at home

Keeping safe is important for everyone, whether or not they have epilepsy.

If your seizures are controlled by treatment, your safety may not be affected. But if you continue to have seizures, safety may be an issue.

This leaflet looks at some possible issues around safety for people with epilepsy. It also contains some ideas for making situations safer around your home.

Everyone is different: it can be helpful to remember that other people may have different experiences to you. Things that affect them may not be an issue for you.

 **See our leaflet *seizures*.**

Doing a risk assessment can be one way to identify possible risks when doing an activity and practical ideas to help make the activity safer.

 **See our leaflet *risk* or visit our website for more about risk assessments.**

Some safety issues may not be relevant to you, or you may have your own ideas about what would make situations safer for you.

If you would like to talk through any safety issues you might like to call our helpline.

 **See opposite for contact details.**

around the house

Here are some ideas for making your home safer.

Alarms

Some people with epilepsy choose to have an alarm to get help when they have a seizure. This can be particularly helpful if you have seizures at night or if you live alone.

There are different types of alarm for different types of seizure. Some have a button to press if you know that a seizure is going to happen. Others are triggered if you fall with no warning or if you shake (convulse) during a seizure.

Alarm systems are sometimes available through local social services departments or housing associations as part of an 'assessment of need' (see page 14).



See our factsheet *alarms and safety aids*.

Fire safety

If you have a seizure while cooking or smoking there is a risk of fire.

The UK Fire Service recommends that everyone has a smoke alarm on each level of their home (for example, one upstairs and one downstairs) and that you check the batteries regularly.

Fire-resistant fabrics and furniture are recommended for everyone but will still catch fire if the heat is intense enough.



Visit www.fireservice.co.uk

Floors and furnishings

Some types of hard flooring, such as ceramic tiles, could injure you if you fall on to them. Non-slip flooring, linoleum (lino), cushioned flooring or carpets may reduce the risk of an injury if you fall. Avoiding coarse fabrics might reduce the chance of friction burns if you have convulsive seizures.

Using protective covers on sharp corners of furniture, or having furniture with rounded edges, might avoid injury if you fall against it.

Choosing carpets and fabrics that can be easily cleaned might be useful if you drop anything on to them during a seizure.



Contact our helpline for supplier information (see back page).

Glass

If you fall against glass during a seizure and it breaks you could be injured.

All new buildings use safety glass to reduce the risk of injuries. Safety glass is designed to be difficult to break or to hold together if it is broken.

Replacing glass in older buildings with safety glass might be helpful. Alternatively, safety glass film prevents glass shattering if it gets broken. This is a plastic film that can be fitted onto glass doors and windows.



Safety glass film is available from DIY and hardware stores and online suppliers.

Heating your home

The following tips might lower the risk of injury during a seizure.

- Radiator covers can protect you against injury and burns.
- Using heaters that are secured to the wall or floor means you can't knock them over.
- Fixing a fireguard to the floor can stop you falling into an open fire.
- Covering hot pipes with lagging can prevent injury if you grip them or fall against them.

Storing and taking medication

To avoid other people taking your medication accidentally it is best to keep it locked away or out of reach.

Some people like to keep their medication in a drug wallet that has different containers, one for each day of the week. Each container is divided into sections for morning, afternoon and evening. Your pharmacist may be able to prepare your medication in blister packs to make it easier to see which drugs you have taken and which you still need to take.

This may also help you notice any errors, for example if you take your medication on the wrong day or if you forget to take it.



Drug wallets are available from us – see back cover for contact details.



See our factsheet *drug wallets and medication aids*.

in the kitchen

Here are some ideas to help make your kitchen safer and avoid possible accidents or injuries if you have a seizure.

Cooking

- Turn saucepan handles to the side to avoid knocking pans off the cooker.
- Using rings or burners at the back of the hob or grilling food rather than frying it can be safer.
- Using a gas or halogen hob means that heat can be turned off quickly.
- Fitting a cooker guard around the front of the hob means that rings or burners are harder to touch by accident.
- Using a low-level grill instead of an eye-level grill can help reduce the risk of injuring your face if you have a seizure.
- Having a heat resistant work surface means that you may be able to slide heavy pans across rather than lifting them.
- Cooking vegetables in a wire mesh cooking basket inside a saucepan means you can lift the basket out after cooking and the hot water drains back into the pan.
- Using a trolley to transfer food from the cooker to the table means that you don't have to carry hot or heavy dishes.

Making hot drinks

- Cordless kettles that switch off automatically and have a lid that 'locks' shut can help prevent scalds if you have a seizure. Using a kettle cradle means that you don't have to lift the kettle to pour the water.
- Cups with plastic lids can help to protect you if you spill a hot drink during a seizure.

Ironing

- Cordless irons that switch off automatically after a set time when not in use and have no cable to trip over can reduce the risk of burns if you have a seizure while ironing.
- Using a tumble dryer may reduce the need for ironing.

Using a microwave

Microwave ovens can be safer than conventional ovens as they turn off automatically after the cooking time has ended. This means there is less chance of food burning or a fire starting if you leave it unattended. Microwaves don't get hot, which means they are less likely to cause burns if touched.

Microwave-safe dishes and containers should not get too hot to the touch so you are less likely to burn yourself when taking food out of the microwave.

Drinks can also be heated in a microwave. Stirring the drink will disperse any uneven 'hot spots' which could burn your mouth.



in the bathroom

Some people with epilepsy need to take extra care when bathing. Having a shower is safer because the water drains away. This can lower the risk of drowning if you have a seizure.

Showers

If you are choosing a new shower or changing your existing one, the following tips may help.

- Avoid showers with high-sided bases as the water level can rise if the drain is covered. Level access or walk-in showers or wet rooms provide easy access and can reduce the number of hard surfaces to fall against, such as the side of a bath.
- A shower curtain, rather than a screen or door, can make it easier for someone to get to you quickly if you have a seizure.
- A fitted shower seat may help reduce the risk of you falling during a seizure.
- Soap trays set into the wall (instead of sticking out) and non-slip shower mats can also help reduce injuries if you fall.

Baths

If you choose to have a bath, or if there is no alternative, then the following may help to reduce risks.

- If possible having a bath when there is someone else around means that they can help you if you have a seizure.

- Using a listening monitor such as a baby monitor might make it easier for someone outside the room to hear that you are OK, while still giving you some privacy.
- Running a shallow bath and putting cold water in first can help prevent scalds if you have a seizure and fall into the water.
- Fitting thermostatically controlled taps means that the water will not get too hot. A qualified plumber can fit these for you.

Other ways to make the bathroom safer

- Doors that open both ways can make it easier for other people to get to you if you have a seizure and need help. An alternative is a concertina door or one that slides sideways.
- Locks that can be opened from the outside, or an “Engaged” sign on the door instead of a lock allows privacy but means that someone can open the door if you need help.
- Using plastic containers for toiletries rather than glass can reduce the chances of injury if you knock them over.
- Floor tiles made of rubber or non-slip flooring may be safer than polished floors.

Some independent organisations carry out research and review products and equipment that can help with safety around the home.



See page 15 for details.

in the bedroom

If there is a risk of you falling out of bed during a seizure, then having a low-level bed or futon means there is less distance to fall and may lower the chance of injury.

Sleeping in the middle of a large bed also reduces the risk of falling out of bed during a seizure.

Padded bed sides are available to help prevent injuries during a seizure or stop you falling out of bed. However, these should be considered with care as it may be possible for your arms or legs to become trapped or injured, depending on the design of the bed sides and how your seizures affect you.

Some people who have seizures during the night have a bed alarm that detects when they have a seizure (see page 4).

Safety pillows

Some people who have seizures while they are asleep use safety or 'anti-suffocation' pillows. The pillows have small holes in so that if you are sleeping face down you should still be able to breathe.



See our factsheet *alarms and safety aids*.

gardening and diy

If you have seizures and would like to do your own home improvements, it may be helpful to think about the type and frequency of your seizures and the potential risks of each job.

Knowing your own abilities may help reduce the risks of accidents or injuries. If you are in doubt about doing a job yourself, you may want to talk to a professional such as an electrician, plumber or gardener.

DIY

For anyone doing DIY it is important to take proper safety measures. If you have seizures there may be other safety issues to consider. For example, if you need to do a job at a height using a ladder, it is important to think about the risk of falling if you have a seizure.

Power tools that have a safety cut-out and use batteries rather than mains power may be safer, as there is no power cord to damage if you have a seizure while using them. Using a circuit breaker at the socket can help protect against the risk of electrocution.

Gardening

Here are some ideas of how to make your garden a safer place.

- Grass or bark chippings are a softer alternative to concrete or gravel and may reduce the risk of a severe injury if you fall.

- Using a petrol lawn mower means there is less chance of cutting through the cable if you have a seizure. Some mowers will stop automatically when the handle is released. If you do use an electric mower a circuit breaker at the plug helps protect against electrocution.

If you have a pond, or you plan to build one, here are some safety tips that may be helpful.

- If possible put the pond where it can be seen from the house.
- A fence around a large pond can provide a safety barrier.
- Bushes or shrubs around the deeper side of a pond can stop you getting too close to the edge.
- It may be possible to fit a safety grid that sits just below the surface of the water. This can hold your weight if you fall on it without spoiling the look of the pond.

seizure alert dogs

The organisation Support Dogs trains dogs to support owners with specific needs. Seizure alert dogs are specially trained to warn their owner before a seizure starts, so they can get help or move to somewhere safe.

Training with a seizure alert dog can be intensive and you need to be having a certain number of seizures to apply. Support Dogs are not able to train your own pet dog.



See page 15 for contact details.

assessment of need

Your local council's social services may be able to help by assessing your needs or carrying out a risk assessment.

Risk assessments are often carried out by an occupational therapist (OT). They will visit you at home to see what help, support or safety equipment you might need because of your epilepsy. The assessment can help to identify practical ideas for reducing risks to make situations safer.



See our factsheet *what help is available?*

outside your home

Some people with epilepsy choose to wear or carry something with them that says they have epilepsy. Epilepsy Society produces a free 'I have epilepsy' card which you can write details about the type of seizures you have, what medication you are taking and how you would like to be helped if you have a seizure.

Other companies provide medical jewellery which can have your details on, or a phone number where further information can be given. These can be helpful if you are taken to hospital as the doctors will be able to get information about your epilepsy and medication.



See our leaflet *leisure* and our factsheet *medical ID cards and jewellery*.



Contact us for a free 'I have epilepsy' card.

further information

Epilepsy Society information

Alarms and safety aids

Drug wallets and medication aids

'I have epilepsy' card

Leisure

Medical ID cards and jewellery

Seizures

What help is available?

other organisations

Disabled Living Foundation

www.dlf.org.uk

Information on living aids, safety products and suppliers.

Ricability

www.ricability.org.uk

Information and product reviews on safety aids and equipment.

Support Dogs

www.support-dogs.org.uk

Trains special dogs to assist and support their owners.

Every effort is made to ensure that all information is correct. Please note that information may change after printing. This information is not a substitute for advice from your own doctors. Epilepsy Society is not responsible for any actions taken as a result of using this information.

www.epilepsysociety.org.uk

cares

A full life for everyone affected by epilepsy.

informs

Website, leaflets, dvds – call 01494 601 392.

researches

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campaigns

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educates

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understands

Medical and care services.

listens

helpline 01494 601 400

Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm

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