# Epilepsy and stress

## Understanding stress

Stress is a normal physical and mental response to life's challenges. From day-to-day responsibilities like work and family through to big life events like the loss of a loved one, stress can affect you at many different times in your life.

**Everyone experiences stress from time to time. If you have epilepsy, it is important to manage your stress carefully as it can lead to more frequent seizures.**

### What happens when you feel stressed?

When you feel stressed, your body responds by releasing hormones that increase your breathing and heart rates. Your muscles may tighten, and you may experience chest pain, high blood pressure and digestive problems.

### Seizures and stress

Many people with epilepsy report having more frequent seizures when they are stressed. Others, who have experimented with stress-reduction techniques such as yoga, have noticed that they have fewer seizures. While more research into the relationship between seizures and stress needs to be done, reducing your stress levels will likely result in better seizure management.

Stress management cannot replace medication, but taking steps to reduce stress may help reduce your seizure frequency.

Epilepsy Smart Australia

## Signs of stress

Stress can sometimes be difficult to measure. This is because what is stressful for one person will not always be stressful for another. A great way to monitor stress levels is to check if you (or the person you are caring for) is experiencing any physical symptoms such as tense muscles, rapid breathing, or a racing heartbeat. Stress can also cause irritability, memory loss, and constant worrying. Behavioural changes such as finding it hard to relax, having difficulty sleeping, or increased alcohol use are also signs of stress.

## Reducing stress

Understanding what causes you stress and avoiding unnecessarily stressful situations is a good first step. If spending time with a particular person or visiting particular places is stressful, try to limit the amount of time you spend on these activities. You may also find the following techniques helpful:

- Exercise — whether gentle or intense — is a great way to reduce stress and improve your mood.
- Meditation and breathing techniques that slow your breathing rate and quieten your mind can help you to relax.
- Time management — establishing priorities and routines can reduce stress.
- Cutting back on commitments can stop you from feeling too rushed.
- Connecting with other people — can improve mood and enhance well-being.
- Psychological approaches — assertiveness training, mental imagery, anxiety management, and work on self-esteem issues can reduce stress.
- Physical approaches — massage, singing, dancing and other enjoyable activities can reduce tension.
- Talk to a qualified mental health worker.
- Getting enough, good quality sleep.
- Taking your medication on time.
- If ongoing stress is a problem for you, talk to your doctor.

## Other resources

The following links provide great information and support resources where you can get more information on managing stress:

- **www.beyondblue.org.au/resources**
- **www.mindhealthconnect.org.au**
- **www.kidshelpline.com.au**

## Epilepsy support

The National Epilepsy Support Service (NESS) is available Mon – Sat, 9:00am – 7:00pm (AEST) to provide support and information across Australia. Phone: 1300 761 487. Email: support@epilepsysmart.org.au

## Lived experience

We recognise all people living with epilepsy and the impact it has on their lives. We take a moment to acknowledge the lived experience they have shared with us. In sharing their stories, we acknowledge the strength and resilience people living with epilepsy have shown in the face of not getting a fair go.

## A medical note

**The information contained in this publication provides general information about epilepsy. It does not provide specific advice. Specific health and medical advice should always be obtained from a qualified health professional.**



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