Epilepsy and unplanned pregnancy

An unplanned pregnancy can be stressful, especially if you have epilepsy.

If you think you may be pregnant, confirm it with your doctor as soon as possible. Medical and emotional support is available.

Did you know that women with epilepsy have a higher risk of unplanned pregnancy? This is because many hormone-based contraceptives are affected by anti-seizure medication (ASM). If you think you may be pregnant, confirm it with your doctor as soon as possible, and reach out for support. You do not have to go it alone, and it is okay to make whatever decision is right for you at this time.

What is right for you?

While not all unplanned pregnancies are unwanted, it is normal to experience mixed emotions if you are pregnant and were not planning on it. Aside from deciding whether to proceed with the pregnancy, you may also feel worried about other practical things, like seizure control, pregnancy risk, and finances. This sheet provides you with some steps to take if you are feeling unsure.

Epilepsy Smart Australia

Understanding the risks

If you have epilepsy, you might be worried about the risks that come with pregnancy. While most women with epilepsy (93%) have healthy babies, there is an increased risk of complications during pregnancy. These risks include:

- changes in seizure control throughout pregnancy
- risk of congenital malformation because of ASM medication
- increased risk of foetal death and stillbirth.

Talk to your doctor

If you think you may be pregnant, it is important to see your doctor or neurologist right away. Do not stop taking your ASM as it may increase the frequency and severity of your seizures. Your doctor may adjust your medication if you decide to continue with the pregnancy. Be sure to talk to your doctor about the following things:

- a blood test to confirm your pregnancy
- your current level of seizure control
- the safety of your epilepsy medication during pregnancy.

Take care of yourself

Deciding on whether or not to continue with your pregnancy is a very personal decision. Whatever you decide, be sure to seek support from family, friends, and/or an unbiased mental health professional. It is also important to stay as physically healthy as possible. Wherever possible, try to:

- avoid your seizure triggers
- get 7-9 hours of sleep every night.
- take time to rest during the day
- take your medication exactly as instructed by your doctor.

Other resources

The **Australian Pregnancy Register for Women on ASMs** can enrol you on their register if you are pregnant and interested in participating in research about these issues.

Phone: 1800 069 772
Web: www.neuroscience.org.au/australian-epilepsy-pregnancy-register

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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