Medications and epilepsy

Medication can be a great way to manage epilepsy. Around 70% of people with epilepsy can achieve good seizure control by taking their medication correctly.

Medication does not cure epilepsy, but it can prevent or control seizures.

Always follow the doctor's instructions when administering medication. This will ensure the best outcome and prevent unwanted side effects. If you or a person in your care is worried about medication, talk to a doctor right away.

There are two types of medications for epilepsy:

1. Anti-seizure medications (ASMs)
2. Emergency medication.

Anti-seizure medications

ASMs are the most common treatment for seizure control. Although they will not cure epilepsy, they can usually control seizure activity. There are many different types of ASMs available. The goal of ASMs is to make the person seizure-free. ASMs are usually prescribed based on:

- how well they work for specific seizure types
- how well a person can tolerate them
- any other health-related conditions a person may have
- any medications a person is already taking
- how seriously the seizures are affecting a person's life.

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Emergency medication

Emergency medication works by stopping seizure activity. It is taken when a seizure occurs. Emergency medication can reduce the impact of seizure activity and potentially save a life. If an older person is having many seizures or seizures that last a long time, the doctor may also prescribe emergency medication.

The doctor will advise when to use the emergency medication and how to store it. Emergency medication information is recorded in an Emergency Medication Management Plan. Only medical practitioners or people who have training in administering emergency medication can give emergency medication.

Starting new medication

There are a few things that an older person or their carer needs to understand when starting a new medication. These include:

- why the medication has been prescribed
- the correct daily dosage and when to take it
- any known side effects and how to report them
- how to record any changes to the person's general health
- whether ongoing medical reviews are needed.

Missed doses

If a person in your care misses a dose of their medication, it is usually fine to take it as soon as it is remembered. Do not double up if it is not remembered until it is almost time for the next dose, simply keep a record of the doses that were missed.

Changing doses

If the prescribed medication is not managing seizure activity, talk to the prescribing doctor as soon as possible. They may change the medication or dosage to achieve better control. Withdrawing from medication should always be done under medical supervision. Do not suddenly stop the medication as it can bring on seizures and could create a medical emergency.

What about other medications?

Many older people have other medical conditions that also require medication. These may have an impact on what type of ASMs can be prescribed. People in their later years also experience differences in the way drugs are absorbed and broken down. It is good practice to ask the doctor to discuss the risks and benefits of all medication.

The doctor will describe common side effects of the prescribed medication; however, it is also good to ask the pharmacist to go through any possible side effects.

Side effects

Like any medication, ASMs can cause undesirable side effects, including:

- skin rashes
- falls
- difficulty concentrating or thinking
- problems with memory.

ASMs can also contribute to osteoporosis or decreased bone strength which increases the risk of a broken bone. Bone density assessments may be necessary for people who take ASMs for an extended time.

What can you do to help?

If you are caring for an older person with epilepsy, you must understand their medication and its side effects. Medication side effects can be overwhelming and upsetting for many older people. You can also offer support by:

- Understand the person's Epilepsy Management Plan (EMP).
- Encourage the older person to ask for more information and discuss the options with their doctor, family, a close friend, or carer if concerned.
- Ensure the person has their medication regularly and at set times.
- Help the older person to put strategies in place to remind them to take their medication.
- Suggest a pillbox or Webster Pack, which can help if the older person needs to keep track of multiple medications.
- Encourage the older person to create a routine and combine their medication schedule with daily tasks such as brushing teeth or meals.
- Keep the medication in an easy to see place.
- Encourage mindfulness – discuss the importance of pausing and being present when taking medication to ensure the correct dose is taken.
- If you support an older person who has been prescribed emergency medication, it is important to receive training in the Administration of Emergency Medication.
- Set up reminders on the person's phone, watch or electronic calendar. There is also a range of apps available for smartphones.
- Encourage the older person to complete the Medication summary form on the next page.

Other resources

- **Epilepsy Smart Aged Care Resources**
  www.epilepsysmart.org.au/aged-care-resources/
- **Epilepsy Smart Australia**
  www.epilepsysmart.org.au
- **Australian Government**
  Department of Health
  www.health.gov.au (Search: Guiding principles for medication management in residential aged care facilities)

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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Medication summary sheet

Medication	Dosage	Known side effects	Doctor contact details

The Epilepsy Smart Australia Program received funding from the Australian Government.

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