Managing your seizures

Managing your epilepsy can be challenging. Many people with epilepsy worry that they cannot control their seizures because they often happen without warning. Fortunately, good seizure control is possible for many people if they follow these three important steps:

1. Understand your seizures.
2. Recognise your seizure triggers.
3. Manage your seizure triggers.

Good seizure management involves more than medication. Understanding your seizures, and avoiding your triggers are important parts of living well with epilepsy.

Understand your seizures

Epilepsy differs from person to person. Taking the time to understand your epilepsy will help you (and your doctor) better manage your condition. Here is what to do:

- Ask your doctor to explain your diagnosis and write down the important information. If you are unsure about something, ask questions. It is in your best interest to fully understand your condition.

- Keep a seizure diary – keeping a record of the types of seizures you experience and how long they last is a good idea. You can use a notebook, access our Seizure Record Form, or use an app like Seizure Tracker. You may need to ask someone to write this down for you or take a video of your seizure, which you can show to your doctor during consultations.

- Talk to a support worker by calling the National Epilepsy Support Service (NESS) on 1300 761 487.
Recognise your triggers

Understanding what brings on (triggers) a seizure can help you predict when a seizure might occur. When you understand your triggers, you may be able to reduce your chances of having a seizure. Your seizure triggers will be unique to you, and some people cannot identify their seizure triggers. As a starting point, look out for these common triggers:

- missing your medication
- illness and fever
- not getting enough sleep
- periods and hormones
- feeling stressed
- over the counter drugs
- drinking alcohol
- photosensitivity (flashing lights)
- skipping meals.

Manage your triggers

Once you know what your triggers are, you can take steps to manage them. Below are some common ways people have found to manage their epilepsy to reduce their seizures that might be able to help you:

Get enough sleep

Not getting enough good quality sleep increases your chance of having a seizure. Wherever possible, try to reduce your late nights and keep a regular sleep pattern. If you are worried about sleep, talk to your doctor.

Manage your stress

Stress is part of daily life; however, for some people, it can trigger seizures. If you are experiencing high levels of stress or anxiety, talk to your doctor, as they can help you develop a management plan. Other stress management options include:

- relaxation and breathing techniques
- meditation
- exercise
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and other forms of psychology.

Remember to take your medication

Anti-seizure medications can help prevent seizures; however, you need to take them as prescribed. Skipping or forgetting to take your medication increases your chances of having a seizure. It can also make your seizures more frequent, intense, or longer. If you find it difficult to remember your medication, simple items such as tablet boxes, timers, and alarms can help. If you are worried about your medication, talk to your specialist or pharmacist.
Reduce alcohol
Alcohol can reduce the effectiveness of your epilepsy medication. It can also interrupt your sleep and lead to missed medication. If you are worried about your alcohol intake, talk to your specialist.

Eat regularly
Some people have seizures if they miss a meal and their blood sugar drops. Try to eat at regular times and have nutritious snacks throughout the day. Eating after exercise is a good idea. Cutting back on caffeine may also help.

Exercise
Exercise is generally good for people with epilepsy. It can also be good for seizure control. In some rare cases, physical exertion (overdoing it) can trigger a seizure. Talk to your specialist about what exercise is right for you.

Be careful with illness, pain, and fever
Illness, injury, pain, and fever with a high temperature can trigger seizures. If you are unwell or injured, try to keep your temperature down and talk to your doctor.

Understand your hormones
Female hormones can affect seizures. Some women report having more seizures during certain times of their menstrual cycle, after childbirth and leading up to menopause. If you think this may be happening with you, keep a diary and speak to your doctor.

Talk to your doctor about over-the-counter drugs
Over-the-counter medications (those you can buy without a prescription) may affect your epilepsy medication. Make sure your doctor knows all the medications you are taking, including herbs and supplements.

Avoid flashing lights and complex patterns
For some people, especially children, flashing lights (photosensitivity) and visual patterns can trigger seizures. Avoid these triggers wherever possible.

Other resources
For more information about contraceptive choices, call our Information Line on 1300 761 487.

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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Epilepsy Smart Australia Program
National Epilepsy Support Service 1300 761 487
Website epilepsysmart.org.au

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