
Self-esteem and epilepsy in the later years

When a person in their later years is diagnosed with epilepsy, it can impact their self-esteem. Unlike some age-related conditions, seizures can be unpredictable. As a result, many older people feel afraid, isolated and misunderstood. These feelings can affect their independence, confidence and self-esteem. If you are an aged care worker or carer, it is important to understand how epilepsy can affect self-esteem.

A late-onset diagnosis of epilepsy can cause anxiety and self-esteem issues in older people.



What does this mean for the older person?

Self-esteem refers to a person's sense of personal value or worth. When an older person is diagnosed with epilepsy, the way they see themselves may change. For some older people, being diagnosed with epilepsy feels like a loss of independence. Others worry about not being able to control their seizures, especially in public.

Many older people with epilepsy also experience the following symptoms, which can negatively affect self-esteem and mental wellbeing:

- poor quality sleep
- decreased mental alertness
- higher prevalence of depression and anxiety.

If an older person in your care is experiencing these symptoms, encourage them to talk to their doctor. They may also benefit from talking about their feelings with a trusted family member or friend.

Signs of low self-esteem

Self-esteem issues present differently for different people. Common signs of low self-esteem include:

- lack of motivation
- wanting assistance with basic activities
- unwillingness to participate in everyday activities
- risk-taking behaviours
- attention seeking behaviours
- difficulty forming and maintaining friendships
- lack of self-care or self-harm
- fear of rejection or judgement by others
- worries about being stigmatised.

What can you do to help?

Aged care workers and carers can encourage older people living with epilepsy to discuss their feelings or concerns with those around them. It is important to remind the older person that epilepsy is a common neurological condition, and they are not alone.

If an older person with epilepsy displays self-esteem problems, it may be helpful to follow these steps:

1. Encourage the person to talk about their feelings and concerns.
2. Show empathy and develop a plan to support them.
3. Seek advice from appropriate professionals if required.
4. Seek training for family, friends, aged care workers and carers to build their ability to support the person.

Further information

- **Epilepsy Smart Australia**
www.epilepsysmart.org.au
- **Beyond Blue**
www.beyondblue.org.au
- **Relationships Australia**
www.relationships.com.au
- **Mental Health Foundation of Australia**
www.mhfa.org.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.