

Stress and epilepsy

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Introduction

Stress can be a feeling of excitement, tension, sadness or fear. Or, it can be another emotion that's caused by a situation in your life. Stress can be related to family or work, health or money problems, and lots more. Some people with epilepsy find that, when they are stressed, they have more seizures than usual.

Stress and epilepsy

Stress doesn't cause epilepsy, but it can cause changes to the way the nerve cells in the brain work. This can make seizures more likely.

Stress and seizures

- It can quicken your breathing rate and make you hyperventilate.
- It can cause memory problems, so you might forget to take your anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs).
- It can interfere with your sleep patterns, making you very tired.

All these factors can trigger seizures. So, although stress doesn't cause epilepsy, it can make you more prone to seizures. Additionally, worrying about having seizures can add to your stress. This can become a vicious circle, with stress causing seizures and seizures causing stress.

Dealing with stress

If you think stress triggers your seizures, you may be able to help yourself by:

- avoiding situations that you know will be stressful
- learning relaxation techniques, such as exercise, yoga, tai chi or listening to music
- having a massage*
- doing something else you enjoy
- sharing your concerns with a trusted person.

*For information about aromatherapy oils and epilepsy, contact Epilepsy Action.

If there are times when you can't avoid stress, try to make an extra effort to get enough sleep, and to take your anti-epileptic drugs on time.

Further information

You can get information about stress from NHS Choices at www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress

About this fact sheet

This publication is written by Epilepsy Action's advice and information team, with guidance and input from people living with epilepsy and medical experts.

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Epilepsy Action would like to thank Alison Carr, epilepsy specialist nurse, Bradford Epilepsy Services, Eccleshill Community Hospital for her contribution to this fact sheet.

Disclosure

Alison Carr has no conflict of interest.

Disclaimer

Epilepsy Action makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of information in its publications but cannot be held liable for any actions taken based on this information.

Feedback

If you have any comments about this fact sheet, we would love to hear from you. You can also contact us if you would like to know where we got our information from.

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About Epilepsy Action

For more information on epilepsy, please contact us in any of the ways described below.

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