
Epilepsy and learning

Summary

- Most people living with epilepsy progress well as learners across school and further education.
 - There are laws that protect the right to education and training for people with a disability.
 - The Epilepsy Foundation's **Epilepsy Smart Schools** program and website provides a range of information and classroom supports for families, teachers and children living with epilepsy.
 - Visit education and training institutions and arrange to meet with course coordinators and disability support staff. This can increase the likelihood of achieving your learning goals.
 - Learning difficulties in people with epilepsy may be linked with seizure activity, medication, or with the underlying neurological cause.
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Epilepsy is a common condition of the brain in which people experience recurrent unprovoked seizures. Most people living with epilepsy progress well as learners through primary and secondary school, further education and training.

However, the specific nature of your epilepsy and treatment may affect your learning journey. Learning challenges in school and further education may have an impact on your aspirations and goals in life. Fortunately, there are various services available for people of all ages living with epilepsy that can help.

Learning and epilepsy

Learning is important for people of all ages, not just children. Likewise, the impacts of epilepsy on learning can be experienced at any age. The extent of the impact is very individual; some learners are greatly affected while others may not be.

The impact that epilepsy has on your learning can be related to the type of epilepsy you have, its cause and the brain regions it affects, as well as the treatment you are having. Being absent from school or training due to seizures may also affect your learning.

Epilepsy can affect your cognitive skills

Cognitive skills enable people to process information, reason, remember and relate. They involve mental activities such as thinking, understanding, learning and remembering.

The ability to make sense of new information is crucial to successful learning. Cognitive issues may be responsible for learning difficulties in people with epilepsy, which may impact negatively on their academic outcomes and behaviour.

Visual processing refers to how visual information is interpreted by the brain. This is different to difficulties with sight or with the sharpness of vision. For example, someone with a visual processing disorder might have difficulty remembering visual information, or they may have difficulty recognising numbers, letters or symbols.

As visual and spatial function is predominantly controlled by the right hemisphere of the brain, learners who experience focal seizures in this hemisphere may exhibit visual processing difficulties. This might be the reverse for learners who are left handed.

Auditory processing refers to an individual's ability to analyse or make sense of information taken in through the ears. An auditory processing deficit can interfere directly with speech and language, but can affect all areas of learning. For example, it may negatively impact attention and concentration. This may look like the person isn't listening or is unable to follow verbal instructions.

The left temporal and parietal lobes of the brain are critical for reading and language development. Therefore, people who experience seizures in the left hemisphere of the brain may experience language difficulties. (This is not the case for everyone and may be the reverse for those who are left-handed.)

Like auditory processing, difficulties with language abilities may look like poor concentration or attentiveness or memory problems, as well as difficulties reading, writing or spelling.

Epilepsy and memory

Memory is a complex process that occurs within the brain. It allows you to store, retain and recall information and experiences.

Although not all people living with epilepsy experience memory difficulties, it is one of the most common challenges reported by people living with epilepsy.

The types of memory difficulties that a person has may depend on the type of epilepsy and the underlying cause.

Epilepsy medication side-effects and learning

Medication side effects may have an impact on learning and cognition. Experiencing side effects is common, particularly in the early stages of starting a medication. Ask your doctor what side effects to look out for, and what you should do if you experience any side effects.

Epilepsy, further education and training

Transitioning into further education (TAFE, vocational training and university) is a significant challenge for anyone – whether you are a young person moving on from secondary school, or someone seeking to advance existing skills, learn new skills or change your career.

Starting further education and training comes with movement to a new environment, new learning styles, new forms of assessment, and being surrounded by a wide range of different people. This transition can be particularly daunting for some people who live with epilepsy.

Various support services are available that can help you plan and navigate your learning journey. These can be customised to suit your unique situation and needs.

If you are living with epilepsy and a cognitive disability you may benefit from additional assistance in the areas of planning, education arrangements, accessibility, assistive technology or other supports. For some people, flexible deadlines might help to manage the impact of their epilepsy on their learning. For others, a broader range of supports might be necessary.

Talk to your doctor about what your support needs might be, and contact your place of learning to find out what services are available. All TAFEs and universities have dedicated Disability Liaison Officers or Disability Support Officers to assist students with a disability studying in their institution. These staff can assist with:

- providing academic support workers (such as note takers or readers)
- access to adaptive technology (such as voice activated software)
- alternative arrangements for assessment (additional time, scribes)
- alternative course materials
- enrolment and campus orientation
- liaison with lecturers and teachers
- physical access to facilities
- referral to other support services (such as counselling, health, housing, finance).

The **[Disability Standards for Education 2005](#)** clarify the obligations of education and training providers under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and ensure that students with disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as other students.

Better Health Channel has more information and resources around **[epilepsy and employment](#)**.

Epilepsy support at school

There are various resources available to support young learners with epilepsy.

The Epilepsy Foundation has developed a program called **[Epilepsy Smart Schools](#)**. This national program provides a range of information and classroom supports for families, teachers and children living with epilepsy.

Where to get help

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- **Epilepsy Foundation Victoria**. Information Line: **1300 761 487** or **(03) 8809 0600**
- **Epilepsy Smart Schools** Tel. **1300 852 853**
- Disability Liaison Officer or Disability Support Officer at your place of learning

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