Epilepsy and exercise
Exercise is good for everyone, but it also has important benefits for people with epilepsy and can contribute to improved seizure control. Physical exercise rarely triggers seizures. Take all necessary safety precautions while exercising. Anti-epileptic drugs can affect sporting performance.

Epilepsy is a common condition of the brain in which a person has a tendency to have recurrent unprovoked seizures. People with epilepsy and their families are often concerned about exercise triggering seizures, which frequently results in overprotection and needless activity restrictions.

Exercise and epilepsy

Exercise is good for everyone, but it also has important benefits for people with epilepsy. Although in some types of epilepsy, seizures can be triggered by physical exercise, these are extremely rare and exceptional. In general, physical activity does not worsen epilepsy and in many cases it may even improve seizure control, most likely through improved overall health.

People with epilepsy can safely participate in most sports. Even contact sports have not been shown to trigger seizures. Water sports are also safe if seizures are well controlled and a direct supervisor is present.

Special care or caution is needed with sports involving heights such as some types of gymnastics (for example, parallel bars and uneven bars) or horse riding.

Sports that involve extreme risk if a seizure should happen, such as hang-gliding, scuba-diving, downhill skiing, free climbing and car or motorbike racing are not recommended.

Additional limitations are necessary for people who have frequent seizures, or whose epilepsy is accompanied by other disabilities.

Most sports activities are safe but it is wise to avoid over-exertion, becoming dehydrated and hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar) as these situations can increase the risk of a seizure happening.

Exercise safety issues and epilepsy

General safety considerations may include:

- Avoid your known seizure triggers – for instance, if lack of sleep can be a seizure trigger for you, get a good night’s sleep before playing sport, or avoid exercise if you are overtired.
- Stay well-hydrated and eat something before exercising.
- Don’t continue exercising if you feel faint, lightheaded, nauseous or generally unwell.
- Don’t overexert yourself – know your limits.
- If heat or becoming overheated is a trigger for you, exercise in an air-conditioned gym or at a cooler time of day.
- Make sure your coach and possibly teammates know what to do if you have a seizure.
- If involved in solo exercise, consider wearing a medical alert bracelet or pendant, so people can easily identify you have epilepsy.
- Wear protective gear appropriate to your sport, such as a helmet.
- Always wear a life jacket when involved in water sports.
- Let family or friends know your walking, jogging or exercise route before you leave, and how long you will be out.
- Consider carrying a mobile phone with an ICE (in case of emergency) telephone number listed.
- Always take your medication as prescribed.

Anti-epileptic medications and exercise

Anti-epileptic medications are the mainstay of epilepsy treatment, but some of the side effects are likely to affect sporting performance. Some of the side effects for antiepileptic medications include:

- fatigue and tiredness
- blurred vision
- problems with concentration
- problems with balance and coordination
- poor motivation and energy
- slower reaction times

If you have medication side effects that are affecting your daily life and sporting performance, speak to your doctor about reviewing your medications.

If you take up a training program and lose a lot of weight, you may also need to have your medications reviewed as it may affect how your medications are absorbed.
Avoid taking anabolic steroids, as they can have long-term side effects and possibly interfere with anti-epileptic medication levels in the blood. Some people have reported seizures in relation to anabolic steroid use.

Engaging in physical activities and sports can help prevent or counteract the side effects of some antiepileptic medication, such as weight gain or increased fragility of bones.

**Exercise-related epilepsy triggers**

Seizures that happen during or after exercise may be due to triggers such as:

- extreme fatigue
- lack of sleep
- dehydration (and electrolyte loss)
- hyperthermia (elevated body temperature)
- hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar levels).

Suggestions to help you avoid these triggers include:

- Make sure you take your medication as prescribed.
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after exercise.
- Eat well before exercise and take a light snack or fruit if you need something immediately beforehand.
- Don’t push yourself to the point of physical exhaustion.
- If you are feeling very hot and tired, slow down or stop.
- Make sure you have at least two rest days every week.
- Make sure your diet is nutritionally adequate.
- Get plenty of rest and good quality sleep.
- Limit or abstain from alcohol.

**Where to get help**

- Your GP (doctor)
- Neurologist
- Epilepsy Action Australia Tel: 1300 37 45 37
- Epilepsy Foundation Victoria Information Line: 1300 761 487 or (03) 8809 0600

**References**

- Sports and activities, Epilepsy Action Australia.

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More information

Brains and nerves

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- Brain and nerve basics
- Brain and head injury
- Brain tumours
- Brain related conditions
- Epilepsy and seizures
- Nerve related conditions
- Spinal cord
- Speech and language
- Tests and procedures

Brain and nerve basics

- Brain
  - Messages relay between the brain and the motor and sensory nerves of the body in a constant 'conversation'.
  - Brain death
  - Brain death differs from other states of unconsciousness in important ways.
- Brain surgery
Brain surgery is performed for a number of reasons, including alterations in brain tissue, brain blood flow and cerebrospinal fluid.

- **Central nervous system birth defects**
  Folic acid taken before conception, and during at least the first four weeks of pregnancy, can prevent around seven out of 10 cases of neural tube defects.

- **Coma**
  A wide range of illnesses, conditions and events can cause coma.

- **Epilepsy and Young People - Diagnosis (video)**
  Epilepsy is the world’s most common serious brain disorder and is characterized by a tendency to have recurrent seizures. Most seizures are spontaneous and brief yet self-limiting and can involve.

- **Nervous system**
  The nervous system helps all the parts of the body to communicate with each other.

**Brain and head injury**

- **Acquired brain injury**
  The long-term effects of brain injury will be different for each person and can range from mild to profound.

- **Alcohol related brain impairment**
  A person with alcohol related brain impairment (ARBI) might experience problems with coordination, thinking, planning and memory.

- **Alcohol related brain impairment - memory loss**
  If a person with alcohol related brain impairment is aware of their memory limits, they can learn how to deal with them.

- **Alcohol related brain impairment - support**
  People with alcohol related brain impairment benefit when their life is organised and follows a good structure.

- **Brain injury and sexual issues**
  A brain injury can change the way a person experiences and expresses their sexuality.

- **Head injuries and concussion**
  There is no specific treatment for mild head injury other than plenty of rest, and not overdoing things.

- **Subarachnoid haemorrhage**
  A subarachnoid haemorrhage is any bleed located underneath one of the protective layers of the brain known as the arachnoid layer.

- **Subdural haematoma**
  Subdural haematomas are blood clots formed underneath one of the protective layers of the brain.

**Brain tumours**

- **Acoustic neuroma**
  In its earlier stages, an acoustic neuroma can present similar symptoms to other, less serious conditions, which may delay diagnosis and treatment.

- **Brain tumours - cancer**
  Brain cancer symptoms and treatment depend on which part of the brain is affected.

- **Brain tumours - gliomas**
  Gliomas are brain tumours associated with the three types of glial cell in the brain.

- **Meningioma**
  A meningioma is a non-cancerous brain tumour and responds well to treatment.

- **Pituitary tumour**
  Generally, pituitary tumours are benign and slow growing, and pituitary cancers are extremely rare.

**Brain related conditions**

- **Anamnesis**
  Loss of memory can be temporary or permanent, but 'amnesia' usually refers to the temporary variety.

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Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD)
Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease is characterised by physical deterioration of the brain, dementia and walking difficulties.

Dementia explained
Dementia is not a normal part of ageing and can happen to anybody.

Epilepsy explained
Epilepsy is the world's most common serious brain disorder and is characterised by a tendency to have recurrent seizures. Most seizures are spontaneous and brief yet self-limiting and can involve.

Headache
Although nearly all of us will experience a headache during our lifetime, persistent headaches need to be medically investigated with tests such as scans, eye tests or sinus x-rays.

Headache – migraine
Migraine causes a severe and throbbing headache, usually on one side of the head, as well as symptoms such as nausea.

Hydrocephalus
Hydrocephalus is the abnormal enlargement of the brain cavities (ventricles) caused by a build-up of cerebrospinal fluid.

Leukoencephalopathy
Leukoencephalopathy refers to a group of inherited disorders that affect the white matter of the brain, which causes loss of normal brain functions.

Stroke explained
A stroke interrupts blood flow to an area of the brain and is a medical emergency.

Epilepsy and seizures

Epilepsy and employment
Many people living with epilepsy are successfully employed across a range of professional fields.

Epilepsy
Medication can provide seizure control for approximately 70 per cent of people with epilepsy.

Epilepsy and exercise
It is rare for a person with epilepsy to have a seizure during physical activity, but you should always take safety precautions when exercising.

Epilepsy and Young People - Diagnosis (video)
Epilepsy is the world's most common serious brain disorder and is characterised by a tendency to have recurrent seizures. Most seizures are spontaneous and brief yet self-limiting and can involve.

Epilepsy - first aid and safety
Good seizure management is an important part of reducing the risks associated with epilepsy.

Epilepsy in children
Children with epilepsy generally have seizures that respond well to medication, and they enjoy a normal and active childhood.

Epilepsy - lifestyle issues
Learn about your epilepsy so that you can make informed decisions about your lifestyle.

Fever - febrile convulsions
A febrile convolution is a fit that occurs in children when they have a high fever.

Fibromyalgia
Fibromyalgia is a condition associated with widespread pain and tenderness.

Medicinal cannabis
Medicinal cannabis is a legal, high quality medicine that can be prescribed for people by their doctor.

Nerve related conditions

Bell's palsy
The majority of people with Bell's palsy, around 90 per cent, will recover completely with time.

- **Carpal tunnel syndrome**
  Carpals tunnel syndrome can be caused by repetitive hand movements, pregnancy and arthritis.

- **Complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS)**
  Complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS) is a painful condition of a person’s arm, hand, leg or foot, which occurs after an injury, such as a fracture.

- **Diabetes type 2**
  Type 2 diabetes may be prevented, but it cannot be cured.

- **Diabetic neuropathy**
  Diabetes is the most common cause of neuropathy.

- **Eyes - optic neuritis**
  Optic neuritis is inflammation of the optic nerve that causes blurred, grey and dim vision.

- **Friedreich’s ataxia**
  To the casual observer, a person with Friedreich ataxia may seem to be drunk.

- **Guillain-Barré syndrome**
  Most people with Guillain-Barré syndrome experienced some form of viral or bacterial infection before the onset of symptoms.

- **Neuralgia**
  Neuralgia is pain in a nerve pathway. Generally, neuralgia isn’t an illness in its own right, but a symptom of injury or a particular disorder.

- **Pins and needles**
  Pins and needles is a sensation of uncomfortable tingling or prickling, usually felt in the hands or feet.

**Spinal cord**

- **Quadriplegics - tendon transfer surgery**
  Many quadriplegics could live more independent lives with a highly specialised operation called tendon transfer surgery.

- **Spina bifida**
  Folate can prevent up to 70 per cent of spina bifida cases if taken daily for one month before conception and during the first three months of pregnancy.

- **Spinal cord injury - paraplegia**
  Most people who have a spinal cord injury are young males, who have a greater tendency to indulge in risky behaviour.

- **Spinal muscular atrophy (SMA)**
  A child with spinal muscular atrophy type 1 rarely lives beyond three years of age.

- **Syringomyelia**
  Syringomyelia is the growth of a cyst in the spinal cord that may result in paraplegia or quadriplegia if not treated.

**Speech and language**

- **Childhood apraxia of speech**
  Childhood apraxia of speech affects a person’s ability to organise the muscles used in speech.

- **Dyslexia**
  Dyslexia is a type of specific learning difficulty (SLD) in which the person has difficulties with language and words.

- **Stuttering**
  Children who stutter should see a speech pathologist, preferably before they start school.

**Tests and procedures**

- **CT scan**
  The CT scan is a medical imaging procedure that uses x-rays and digital computer technology to create detailed images of the body.

- **EEG test**
  EEG test
In a person with epilepsy, an electroencephalogram (EEG) may show bursts of abnormal discharges in the form of spikes and sharp wave patterns.

- MRI scan
  The MRI scan is a medical imaging procedure that uses a magnetic field and radio waves to take pictures inside the body.

- PET scan
  PET scans are tests that show how an organ or tissue is working.

- X-ray examinations
  An x-ray examination uses a special machine to take two-dimensional pictures of internal body structures to help diagnose conditions or injuries.

Related Information

- Older people in hospital – Get well soon
  Learn about improving and maintaining your health during a hospital stay.

- Breathing problems and exercise
  A little physical activity and some breathing exercises can help people with lung disease.

- Epilepsy and employment
  Many people living with epilepsy are successfully employed across a range of professional fields.

- Menstruation - athletic amenorrhoea
  Women who are athletes or who exercise a lot on a regular basis are at risk of developing athletic amenorrhoea, which is the absence of periods.

- Cancer - exercise to help you cope
  People with cancer should be as physically active as their abilities and condition allow.

Home

Related information on other websites

- Epilepsy Action
- Epilepsy Australia

Support Groups

- Epilepsy Foundation of Victoria

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