



EPILEPSY AND HOME SAFETY December 8, 2015

What is Epilepsy?

Epilepsy is a neurological brain disorder where the nerve cells in the brain are overactive and abnormal. Symptoms of epilepsy can produce different features such as: whole body convulsions, staring into space and muscle twitching. These are caused by a sudden overload of electrical activity in the brain. Epilepsy is diagnosed after a medical provider has reviewed your symptoms and medical history. Tests may be suggested to detect brain abnormality such as an electroencephalogram (EEG).

Risk Factors - Epilepsy

A risk factor is something that makes a person more likely to develop seizures and epilepsy. Sometimes a risk factor can cause scarring of the brain or lead to areas of the brain not developing or working right.

Some risk factors include:

- Brain tumors
- Birth defects
- Infections of the brain (i.e. meningitis)
- Stroke
- Head injuries
- Family history of epilepsy or seizures

Tips for Reducing the Risk of Seizures

- Take anti-seizure medications as prescribed
- Avoid heavy alcohol use and illegal drugs
- Recognize seizure triggers
- Get at least 8 hours of sleep a night
- Avoid taking any drugs that interfere with seizures.

Home Safety Tips for Persons with Epilepsy

Before adopting any measures to help an individual remain safe in the home, be sure you know the type of seizures the individual experiences, their frequency, their triggers, and where they occur most often. This information will in the decision about which safety measures will be most beneficial to the individual with epilepsy.

General Safety Tips

- Use shatterproof glass for mirrors
- Avoid glass tables
- Avoid scatter rugs, instead consider large carpets or wall-to-wall carpet
- Secure heavy items, televisions, computers, other things that could fall off of tables



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- Use fireplace screens at all times, do not leave persons prone to seizures in room alone with fire in the fireplace.
- Choose space heaters that do not tip over
- Avoid clutter in rooms; make sure there is room to fall safely
- Using protective covers on sharp edges of furniture, or having furniture with rounded edges, may avoid injury if you fall against it.

Bathroom Safety Steps

- Use non-skid strips in tub or shower
- Use shower curtains instead of a shower door
- Keep electrical appliances away from the sink or bathtub
- Use tub rails or grab bars
- Use a shower chair with arms or sit in the tub and use a hand held shower nozzle
- Have bathroom doors swing outward instead of inward so that they can be opened in case someone falls

Bedroom Safety Tips

- If there is a risk of falling out of bed during a seizure, have the person sleep in a low-level bed or futon where there is less distance to fall, which may reduce the chance of injury.
- Sleeping in the middle of a large bed can also reduce the risk of falling out of bed during a seizure.
- Padded bed rails may help prevent a person from falling out of bed but there are risks associated with their use. A person's arms or legs can become trapped or injured between the mattress and the rails.
- Putting the bed against the wall also may keep a person from falling out of bed but this arrangement carries the risk of suffocation if the person becomes trapped between the mattress and the walls.
- Consider using a bed alarm that detects when an individual has a seizure.
- Some people who have seizures while they are asleep use safety or 'anti-suffocation' pillows. The pillows have small holes in so that if you are sleeping face down you may be able to breathe more easily.

Ask for help on adaptive aids for home safety. The person's primary care physician may be able to offer literature and guidance on adaptive aides for the individual or refer the person to a rehabilitation specialist who specializes in adaptive equipment and safety measures for persons with epilepsy.

Source: <http://www.epilepsy.com/>

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