

# Understanding Epilepsy

## What is Epilepsy?

Epilepsy is the tendency to have recurrent seizures. It is the same thing as a seizure disorder. A single seizure does not constitute epilepsy.

**300,000 (or 1 in 100)**

people in Canada, are affected by Epilepsy<sup>1</sup>



**50**

million people worldwide<sup>2</sup>

did you know...

Lavender is the official colour of epilepsy named after the flower, which represents solitude and isolation. In countries around the world, on **March 26th Purple Day** is recognized as the official awareness day of epilepsy.

## HOW LONG DO SEIZURES LAST?

**1**



**1 minute is a long time when someone you love is having a seizure**

Epilepsy is not contagious



Canadian parliament officially recognized the day in 2013.

## TREATING EPILEPSY<sup>4</sup>

- ANTISEIZURE DRUGS (ADS) ARE THE MAIN TREATMENT FOR EPILEPSY. ADS HELP CONTROL SEIZURE ACTIVITY.
- WHEN MEDICATION FAILS TO CONTROL SEIZURES, EPILEPSY SURGERY MAY BE BENEFICIAL.

## What do Canadians know about epilepsy? And the survey says...<sup>3</sup>

While **50%** of Canadians commonly associate the colour purple with fruits and vegetables, a mere **3%** drew a parallel of the colour purple to epilepsy.

Aside from fruits and vegetables, the most common associations were royalty (**41%**), the gemstone amethyst (**34%**) and the Purple Heart (**29%**).

Not all Canadians understand the basics of epilepsy seizures - only **56%** knew that seizures last only a minute.

Only **41%** knew that there are multiple types of seizures.

Some good news - more than two-thirds of Canadians knew that epilepsy is a neurological disease and that some patients might experience advanced warnings.



The type of seizure depends on which area of the brain is involved. A person having a seizure may experience an alteration in behaviour, consciousness, movement, perception and/or sensation<sup>10</sup>

## TYPES OF SEIZURES

### GENERALIZED SEIZURES

IN GENERALIZED SEIZURES, ABNORMAL ELECTRICAL ACTIVITY OCCURS THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE BRAIN AT ONCE (BOTH HEMISPHERES). GENERALIZED SEIZURES ALTER CONSCIOUSNESS. THEY CAN BE CONVULSIVE OR NON- CONVULSIVE.

### PARTIAL SEIZURES

PARTIAL SEIZURES BEGIN IN ONE PLACE IN THE BRAIN, CALLED THE SEIZURE FOCUS, AND AFFECT ONLY PART OF THE BRAIN. DEPENDING ON WHERE THEY START AND WHICH PARTS OF THE BRAIN THEY INVOLVE, PARTIAL SEIZURES MAY OR MAY NOT ALTER CONSCIOUSNESS OR AWARENESS.

**MYTH** Epilepsy is rare and there aren't many people who have it.

**FACT** There are more than twice as many people with epilepsy in Canada as the number of people with cerebral palsy (**55,000**), muscular dystrophy (**28,000**), multiple sclerosis (**39,000**), and cystic fibrosis (**3,400**) combined. Epilepsy can occur as a single condition, or may accompany other conditions affecting the brain, such as cerebral palsy, mental impairment, autism, Alzheimer's, and traumatic brain injury.

**MYTH** With today's medication, epilepsy is largely a solved problem.

**FACT** Epilepsy is a chronic medical problem that for many people can be successfully treated. Unfortunately, treatment doesn't work for everyone and there's a critical need for more research.

**MYTH** People with epilepsy are disabled and can't work.

**FACT** People with the condition have the same range of abilities and intelligence as the rest of us. Some have severe seizures and cannot work; others are successful and productive in challenging careers.

**EPILEPSY AFFECTS EACH PERSON LIVING WITH THE DISORDER DIFFERENTLY**

**ANOTHER TERM FOR EPILEPSY IS A SEIZURE DISORDER**

**WHEN A PERSON HAS TWO OR MORE SEIZURES, THEY ARE CONSIDERED TO HAVE EPILEPSY**

**SOME OF THE MOST EXCEPTIONALLY CREATIVE AND TALENTED PEOPLE IN HISTORY HAVE HAD EPILEPSY, INCLUDING:**

**ST. PAUL, ALEXANDER THE GREAT, JULIUS CAESAR, DANTE, JOAN OF ARC, ISAAC NEWTON, MOLIÈRE, NAPOLEON BONAPARTE, HANDEL, BEETHOVEN, FLAUBERT, PAGANINI, TENNYSON, BYRON, CHARLES DICKENS, FYDOR DOSTOYEVSKY, VINCENT VAN GOGH, LEWIS CARROLL, ALFRED NOBEL, AGATHA CHRISTIE, AND RICHARD BURTON.**

## REFERENCES

1 - José F. Teller-Zenteno, Margarita Ponda-Sordo, Suzan Matijevic, Samuel Wiebe (2004), National and Regional Prevalence of Self-reported Epilepsy in Canada, *Epilepsia* 45 (12), 1623-1629.

2 - Epilepsy Atlas. WHO website. Available at: [www.who.int/mental\\_health/neurology/Epilepsy\\_atlas\\_r1.pdf](http://www.who.int/mental_health/neurology/Epilepsy_atlas_r1.pdf).

3 - Legor Marketing - Omnibus survey March 2014.

4 - Treatments for Epilepsy, Epilepsy Matters website. Available at: <http://www.epilepsymatters.com/english/treatments.html> Accessed December 22, 2011.