

# EPILEPSY FACT SHEET



## Safety at Home



While the majority of people with epilepsy live normal lives, things that many of us take for granted around our homes can be hazardous for the person with epilepsy. **The importance of safety at home cannot be overstated.** The good news – with some caution and simple adaptations, many incidents can be prevented.

### The Bathroom

A particular danger for someone with epilepsy is the shower or bath tub. Many incidents brought to our attention have involved bathing. When you shower or bathe – PLEASE:

- Leave the bathroom door **unlocked**.
- **Have someone else in the home with you** who can look in on you – frequently!
- Consider a **shower bench** (ask your physician for a referral to a home medical supplier) and a **hand held shower**.
- Install a hand-rail.
- Place a **rubber mat** on the shower floor.
- **Place padding** on the edges of the bath and consider a padded toilet seat.
- **If you are alone**, consider a **sponge bath**.
- **Avoid glass doors** on your tub and/or shower.
- **Do not use electrical appliances** in the bathroom, or near water.
- **Keep your hot water heater turned down** enough that hot water will not scald.
- Turn on the cold water first.
- Enter the bathtub with you weaker leg and exit with your stronger leg.

Consider this – people have been known to drown in less than two minutes and in less than two inches of water. *Someone entering the clonic phase of a seizure can slip under the water without a sound and drown with little disturbance – even if there are others in the house.* A bath or shower can be a wonderful, relaxing, experience – but if you have epilepsy – we urge you – **take the necessary precautions in order to protect yourself and your loved ones from the devastation of a preventable incident.**

### The Kitchen

Making simple adaptations and exercising caution when working in the kitchen helps to keep everyone safe. Using a microwave oven to cook and prepare food when possible is another change that can be implemented. If you are going to use a stove top, be extra cautious and try to select a model that has controls in front. Use only the front burners when you can and turn the handles of saucepans to face the back of the stove. Appliances such as a kettle that have automatic shut-off features reduce the risk of the kettle boiling dry. Kitchen tools such as automatic egg beaters and electric knives should be avoided as these can cause serious injury if a seizure occurs. Here are a few more ways to increase safety in the kitchen:

- Consider using plastic dinnerware, as opposed to glass.
- Wear rubber gloves when washing dishes.
- When loading the dishwasher, point knives and other sharp objects downward.
- Keep frequently used items stored within easy reach and avoid climbing to minimize your risk of injury.
- Try not to carry large amounts of hot food to the table - serve directly from stove or counter top – and don't forget to use oven mitts.
- Limit the time that is spent cutting and chopping food.

Depending on the type of seizure experienced and its frequency, a person's chance of injury may vary. It is critically important for a person living with epilepsy to be aware of all potential safety hazards and take the necessary precautions. Please remember - if possible, it is always best to have someone else in the home with you while you are cooking. Following the necessary safety measures and guidelines will prevent a serious injury to yourself or someone else.

### TV & Living Rooms

- Keep TV's in good repair.
- Do not sit too close to the television.
- Watch TV at a 45 degree angle.
- Keep a light on (above and behind the viewer) to reduce light contrast.
- Hanging lamps are recommended over table lamps.
- Avoid the use of breakable materials, such as glass top coffee tables – there are many “soft” styled coffee tables on the market.
- Use soft furnishings with rounded corners instead of furnishings with hard or sharp edges.
- Choose chairs with arm rests to help reduce falling.
- Use carpeting with a thick underlay.
- Dispose of throw rugs and loose carpets as they are trip hazards.

### The Bedroom

- Use a box spring and mattress over beds with a hard frame.
- Attach side lamps to the wall.
- Remove pillows from the bed while sleeping if there are concerns about nocturnal seizures.
- A bedroom monitor may alert others in the house if a seizure occurs while sleeping; other devices, such as Philips Lifeline are also available; some devices include an auto alert feature which can summon assistance if the user is not able to.

### General

- Use appliances with an automatic shut-off.
- Avoid the use of candles.
- If you use a space heater, be sure that it can't tip over and place at a safe distance to ensure it can't be knocked over, or burn you if a seizure occurs.
- Install handrails in stairwells and ensure there are lights at the top and bottom.
- Use a safety gate around stairwells to prevent children from falling downstairs.
- Avoid climbing on ladders, chairs, or other objects especially if you are home alone.
- Avoid the use of power tools, which can cause serious injury if a seizure occurs.
- Lock doors when home alone if there is any danger of wandering during a seizure, and to keep children safe.
- Ensure you keep paths clear of clutter and tripping hazards such as electrical cords.
- Carry a cordless phone or cell phone with you.
- Set up a daily 'check-in' time with a family member or friend.
- Keep a minimum seven day supply of medications and take them as prescribed.

**Assess your home carefully to identify hazards and take steps to avoid or minimize them in advance and BE SAFE!**

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