

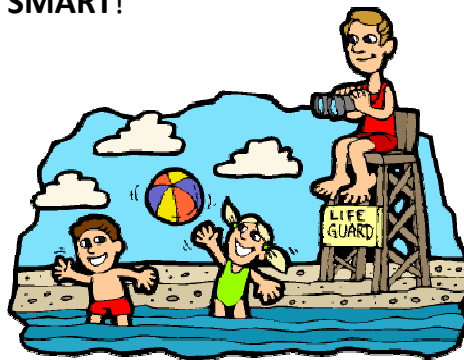
EPILEPSY FACT SHEET

Water Safety and Epilepsy



Physical activity is very good for most people and the person who has epilepsy is no exception. In fact, it has been found that in most cases physical activity *favourably* affects epilepsy. The tension and stress that can trigger seizures may be reduced through physical activity – which includes swimming. To maximize the benefits of swimming and water sports, and minimize the possibility of a preventable incident – **BE WATER SMART!**

SWIM WITH A BUDDY in an area that is supervised by a Lifesaving Society trained lifeguard. Supervision while swimming is important for anyone; it is even more important for someone with a seizure disorder. This is especially true if the person does not experience an aura prior to a seizure and/or has difficulty maintaining seizure control.



If on a boat, **wear a life jacket** and practice safety & common sense before starting out. Avoid the use of alcohol (which can trigger a seizure), drive power boats at a safe speed, be aware of weather conditions and don't go out alone.



If seizures are brought on by bright or flickering light, know that lights reflecting off splashing water could trigger seizure activity. Blue, polarized sunglasses can help minimize the risk. Note: photosensitive epilepsy is relatively rare (less than 5% of those with epilepsy are photosensitive).

Since **hyperventilation** can be a triggering mechanism in seizure activity, the deep, fast breathing needed in competitive or aggressive swimming might cause seizures; therefore, appropriate self-pacing techniques should be used.

KEEP WATCH WITHIN ARMS REACH & ACTIVE SUPERVISION

Under no circumstances should a child be left unsupervised around water, especially if there is a diagnosed seizure disorder. Stay within arms reach, maintain a close watch, and be sure that others supervising are aware of the condition and how to help (preferably a Lifesaving Society trained life guard). If a child is in the water and does not swim, wear a life jacket – unless you are holding him. Limit the number of inflatable water toys, and if you have a home pool, remove them from the water after swim time. This will minimize the risk of a child falling trying to reach them. Keep your home pool gated and locked when not in use.

It is important to know your body and your seizures! If you experience an aura, let somebody know and get out of the water. Knowing your triggers allows you to avoid swimming when you're most at risk of having a seizure. For example, if you have catamenial epilepsy you can avoid water sports at particular times of the month. Stress and anxiety are frequent triggers of seizure activity. Avoid swimming/water when you are feeling anxious or stressed. It is also wise to refrain from water sports when you're changing medications until you know how your body will respond to the change.

A Seizure in the Water

When an individual has a seizure in the pool, the life guard's two concerns are that the person will stop breathing and that s/he will be physically hurt. Although any seizure experienced in or near water could be dangerous or even fatal, it is the tonic clonic (formerly called *grand mal*) seizure that causes the most concern. For this reason a short description of what *could* occur if a NON SUPERVISED swimmer experiences a tonic clonic seizure follows:

While in the *tonic* (rigid) phase the muscles contract, causing the body to lose its buoyancy and sink. When the *clonic* phase begins, the person's muscles contract and relax allowing the lungs to fill with water, causing the person to drown. *This can occur in a few seconds and in just a few inches of water* – whether a pool, lake, or bathtub.

It is very important that individuals prone to seizures or who are swimming with someone prone to seizures take the following preventative measures:

- SWIM WITH A BUDDY.**
- CHOOSE IT. USE IT. WEAR A LIFE JACKET.**
- LET THE LIFE GUARD KNOW ABOUT YOUR SEIZURES**

Seizure Response & Rescue in Unsupervised Waters

RECOGNIZE that a seizure can occur in the water and be alert.

RESPONSE – Call out for help.

RESCUE – Approach the person while maintaining your own safety.

- Turn the person over if they are face down in the water
- Support the head during the seizure
- Remove the person from the water after the seizure has stopped

SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION to ensure that no water has been breathed into the lungs.

If someone has a seizure on a pool deck, place something soft under the head and allow the seizure to take its course.

Lifeguards are there to keep you safe. Inform them about your epilepsy. If you wear a MedicAlert bracelet, the lifeguard has a responsibility to ask you about your condition. If you refuse to answer, you could be refused entry.

For Further Information Contact:

Physician or Healthcare Provider

The Lifesaving Society AB/NWT – www.lifesaving.org



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