



Teenagers & epilepsy - living well

Alcohol & Drugs

For young people, going out to parties and experimenting with drugs and alcohol can be tempting. While your friends may not have to consider their health when making these decisions, you still need to take responsibility for your health and ensure you make the right decisions. Alcohol and drugs, whether legal or illegal, increase the risk of seizures. The concerns surrounding epilepsy and drugs and alcohol apply to both adults and adolescents.

Alcohol and illegal substances can increase the sedative effects of your medication and you may find yourself 'drunk' after only one or two drinks. While you may want to 'keep up' with the amount of alcohol your friends are drinking, it is important to remember that you may react differently to alcohol. By explaining this to your friends, they may be able to help you throughout the night, and will be less inclined to apply peer pressure to influence you to drink more.

To drink alcohol is always going to be your decision (as long as you are over the age of 18!), however there are tips to help you minimize the risk of seizures occurring.

- Drink in moderation (e.g. one or two standard drinks) including drinking plenty of water
- Eat before going out – don't drink on an empty stomach
- Stick to your limits and do not allow anyone to persuade you to drink more
- Avoid binge drinking
- Remember to eat during your night out
- Ask your doctor about the effects of drinking alcohol with your medication

Nightclubbing

If you enjoy the social aspect of going out to a club, epilepsy will not stop you from doing so. However, if you have photosensitive epilepsy, you may need to be

aware of the clubs you plan on going to and avoid ones that have strobe and flash lighting.

The clubs will often advertise a warning if this is the case. As well as photosensitivity, you should also be aware of the temperature of the club and how you are feeling throughout the night. If you are feeling faint or overheated it is a good idea to go out for some fresh air for a few moments or grab something to eat while you sit outside. And always take a buddy!

Dehydration and lack of sleep

Excessive alcohol consumption can lead to both dehydration and lack of sleep, as well as a hangover. As mentioned in the 'What is Epilepsy?' factsheet, lack of sleep can be a significant trigger of seizures.

By staying out or staying up late, there is often a change in sleeping patterns, as well as changes in meal routines, or the possibility of missing a timed dose of medication in the morning. Having a plan in place to minimize the effect of these changes is essential;

- Set an alarm in the morning so you can wake up and take your dose as usual
- Try to eat something around the same time you usually do and try to nap throughout the day instead of sleeping in until midday. This can reduce the extreme change to your sleeping pattern.

Combatting dehydration includes drinking plenty of water between alcoholic drinks and staying hydrated the next morning. Electrolyte drinks can also help ward off dehydration the next day and it is a good idea to

keep a couple of bottles or sachets of these in the fridge or pantry if you are dehydrated in the morning.

Looking After Yourself

As a person with epilepsy it is important to look after

yourself both physically and emotionally. If you have recently been diagnosed with epilepsy or are becoming more in control of your epilepsy as you transition into adolescence, you may start to become aware of more things going on around you and with yourself.

Depression and anxiety disorders can be common in people with epilepsy, especially when you are going through stressful or hard times in your life. Often the stress and concern with living with epilepsy – especially when seizures aren't completely controlled – increases the risk of anxiety disorders. Common symptoms of depression include;

- Not enjoying activities like you used to
- Not going out anymore
- Withdrawing from close family or friends
- Inability to concentrate at school or home
- Trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep

It is important to remember that you are not alone if you are experiencing anxiety or depression. There are numerous ways to work through these feelings and concerns.

- Voice your concerns to your doctor and discuss treatment options
- Open up to your parents or peers about your concerns and accept the help or support they offer
- Try to exercise regularly and get plenty of sleep
- Allow yourself time to relax and do what you enjoy
- Look out for symptoms of anxiety and depression in yourself and seek support at the earliest sign

If you find yourself experiencing any of the points mentioned above, or just want someone to talk to, Beyond Blue are a great source of support, advice and ways to help you. You can head to their website where they have some great resources (www.beyondblue.org.au), or you can get one on one support over the phone (1300 224 636) or online chat. Never be afraid to reach out.

SUDEP (sudden unexpected death in epilepsy)

If a person with epilepsy dies suddenly and no obvious cause can be found, it is called SUDEP.

The cause of SUDEP is unknown. It can be a scary topic of conversation, but most people with epilepsy live a full life span. It is important however, to be aware of who is at risk and how to reduce these risks.

Those at risk may include people who:

- Have uncontrolled seizures
- Have generalized seizures in their sleep
- Are not taking their prescribed AED correctly
- Are having frequent or sudden changes to their AEDs (Antiepileptic Drugs)

Reducing the Risk

There are measures you can take to reduce the risk of SUDEP;

- Maximize seizure control (e.g. consult with epilepsy specialist, re-assess treatment options)
- Never make changes to your medication unless advised by your doctor
- Always take your medication at the same time each day
- Avoid seizure triggers
- Take control of your epilepsy (e.g. actively communicate with your doctor about side effects or health issues)

It can be difficult to talk about SUDEP, but it is important to talk to your doctor or an epilepsy counsellor if you are concerned or would like more information. Open communication with your parents is always encouraged so you are both on the same page regarding your treatment and they can provide the support you need.

Some good old life advice

- Do what you enjoy doing. Don't let your epilepsy stop you from doing what you love to do
- Don't sweat the small stuff – if something isn't working for you, move on
- If friends at school treat you differently because of your epilepsy, sit them down and explain that you're no different to anyone else. Give them a lesson on epilepsy!

Source: The Epilepsy Report, (a report) by Mark Francis from The Epilepsy Centre in SA.
Beyond Blue (2013). Epilepsy, anxiety and depression. Retrieved from www.beyondblue.org.au

Although every effort has been made to ensure accurate and up to date information is provided, Epilepsy Queensland and its advisors cannot accept any liability in relation to the information provided. It is strongly recommended that you discuss any information with your doctor as to whether it applies to you.