



Brainwave The Irish Epilepsy Association
249 Crumlin Road
Dublin 12

Tel: 01-4557500 Email: info@epilepsy.ie Web: www.epilepsy.ie

Sport & Leisure

Using leisure in a constructive way is important. Paid employment is becoming harder to find for everyone, and time that might formerly have been filled by working needs to be taken up by other activities. If work is not possible, then a positive use of leisure time helps to prevent an erosion of physical health and self-esteem.

Children with epilepsy at school should be included in the full range of ordinary team sports and other recreational activities, unless the disorder is severe or other impairments prevent this.

Some local regulations may still be overly restrictive in this area and based on outmoded assumptions, simply knowing that a child has epilepsy says nothing about suitability for sports and other activities. Individual decisions need to be taken by informed professional working with parents and, where possible, the child as well.

MAKE REALISTIC CHOICES

Before any activity is undertaken, the individual with epilepsy should ask, "is this realistic given my particular circumstances"? The list of activities given below, are those about which questions are most frequently asked. If the activity is suitable on health and safety grounds, then attitudes (both of others and the person with epilepsy too) may be the deciding factor.

The more the person with epilepsy can be seen to have something positive to offer, and the confidence to back this up, the easier social integration will be.

Most problems where epilepsy and leisure activities are concerned stem from misinformation coupled with general anxiety about taking risks. An informed person may need to ensure that these are corrected beforehand.

GETTING EPILEPSY INTO PERSPECTIVE

In some people seizures begin for the first time in adulthood. If for instance driving must be abandoned, having a leisure interest, or beginning a new one in the company of other people, can be an important element in positive overall management.

It is important, regardless of the age of the onset of epilepsy, to avoid blaming everything on the epilepsy. Ordinary living involves both successes and failures and it is 'ordinary living', after all, that should be the objective.

WHAT ACTIVITIES MIGHT NEED SPECIAL GUIDANCE?

It is important to remember that one-off accidents can happen to anyone. If a seizure should occur during an activity, this does not automatically mean that something tragic will happen and that future participation must be barred.

Over-reaction to a seizure is understandable on some occasions, but it can lead to over-restriction and its psychological consequences. Anxiety is normal where seizures may happen, but sensible provision can go a long way towards making most activities safe.

Individual assessment and an informed decision about participation are always needed

Swimming

In swimming baths there is little extra risk. Avoid swimming alone, and if necessary inform the lifeguard about the possibility of seizures.

Cycling

Where seizures are controlled there should be no increased risk. If seizures still occur, busy roads are best avoided and a companion is advisable.

Riding

Normal hard riding hats should be worn by all riders. For special facilities where the person with epilepsy is also physically disabled?

Boxing

This is not an advisable activity for a person with epilepsy.

Field sports involving possible injury to the head need assessment for each individual

Climbing

Climbing frames and trees cannot be avoided, even if forbidden by well meaning parents. Most informed opinion now favours the benefits of the normal childhood activities

Yoga

The physical and psychological aspects of yoga may be highly beneficial. The controlled deep breathing associated with the more common forms of yoga should not present any problems

Discos

They are a normal part of growing up and should not be avoided by the young person with epilepsy who wants a social life. Some people may find flashing lights unpleasant, but generally it is only 'strobe' lighting operating at between 15-25 flashes per second that may, in some individuals with photosensitive epilepsy induce a seizure. Most disco lights flash at a slower rate. Covering one eye may help to reduce the effect of the flashing light in susceptible people.

Television

A very few people have so-called 'television epilepsy' and may have a

**&
Videogames**

seizure while watching television or staring at the flashing screen of videogames. If a particular game causes problems, a different game should be chosen without the same stimulus on its screen. If television is the problem, it should be watched in a well-lit room, well away from the set. The susceptible person should avoid approaching the set to make adjustments, or should cover one eye while so doing.

**Social
Drinking**

Some people with epilepsy choose not to drink alcohol at all. But for most an occasional drink should cause no problems. It is well known, however, that over indulgence in alcohol may cause seizures and so 'binge drinking' should be avoided.