



Brainwave The Irish Epilepsy Association
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Taking Control of Epilepsy

Taking control of your epilepsy is an important part of managing the condition of epilepsy. In addition to taking your anti-epileptic medication there are other things you can actively do (or not do) to help reduce seizure frequency. The following are lists of potential trigger factors for people with seizures- some are avoidable, others less easy to avoid. Not all those factors listed will apply to you, but when you read this list aim to be honest as possible in trying to identify any triggers in your lifestyle which may impact on your seizure pattern and which you could avoid or minimise. Where seizures are related to lifestyle issues YOU ALONE have the power and the choice to try to reduce them or perhaps even to eliminate them, which should benefit both your health and general well being.

COMMON TRIGGERS LINKED TO LIFESTYLE AND WELL BEING

MISSED MEDICATION- if forgetting it is a problem consider a pill dispenser-available from pharmacies.

STRESS-e.g. Demanding workload in school or job, unemployment, diagnosis of epilepsy, pressure of finances, marriage, family problems etc, arguments, conflict, bereavement, loss. Consider stress management and relaxation classes-you can access these in your local VEC's evening classes etc.

LACK OF SLEEP- Try to have regular sleep patterns and avoid late nights if possible. If planning a late night compensate by napping earlier in the day, if sleep is broken for lengthy periods talk to your GP

OVERUSE OF ALCOHOL- Keep your intake moderate, see leaflet on Alcohol and Epilepsy

SKIPPING MEALS- Aim to have a regular pattern of meals-do not skip mealtimes even when busy. Poor nutrition may lead to deficiencies in certain vitamins and minerals: Ensure you eat healthily.

EMOTIONAL DISTRESS- e.g. anxiety, excitement boredom, fear, grief, anger, depression, tension. agitation, low self esteem. Consider counselling or stress management approaches.

STIMULANTS- Use of stimulant substances speed, cocaine, ecstasy, heroin,. Avoid these substances.

PHYSICAL EXERTION-(being too active) and conversely under-exertion (being too

inactive). Take a sensible approach to exercise, know your fitness levels and limits and pace yourself

WITHDRAWAL-from alcohol or street drugs: if these are a problem in your life seek help from your GP

POTENTIAL TRIGGERS WHICH ARE LESS EASY TO AVOID

MENSTRUAL PERIODS- in some cases only, also in catamenial epilepsy

FLASHING LIGHTS-in those few cases where a person has been diagnosed with photosensitive epilepsy

SICKNESS-Illness, injury and pain, fever with high temperatures; take care to reduce temperature and seek treatment for illness and injuries.

BREATHING- Hyperventilation, and conversely breath holding; If either is a problem seek your GP's advice

HORMONES-Hormonal disturbances changes e.g. menopause; Metabolic disturbances: Discuss with your doctor

SOUNDS - Specific sound (e.g. sudden loud noise), visual (lights or geometric pattern) and touch (texture) stimuli. If you are triggered by any of these you should inform others who may expose you to them and try to avoid strong contrasting patterns, disco lights, noisy machinery or whatever stimulus triggers you.

CHANGING TIME ZONES- When travelling on long haul trips, changes of time zone may disrupt sleep patterns and medication schedules. Discuss your travel plans with your doctor some weeks in advance of departure, so that any necessary adjustments can be accommodated.