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LIVING WITH SENSE & SAFETY

Everyone faces potential hazards in their home. Unguarded fires, badly fused plugs, carelessness with chip pans etc, can cause accidents. Good safety procedures are important for everyone. For the person with epilepsy additional risks may exist. Those whose seizures are well controlled may need to take a few extra precautions whereas people whose seizures continue to be frequent and unpredictable will need to exercise particular care especially if there is likely to be a sudden loss of consciousness without warning.

Some safety measures to consider are:

FIRES Substantial fireguards are essential. These should be securely fixed to a wall or floorboards so that they cannot be knocked over during a seizure. Lightweight, freestanding heaters are better avoided. Radiator guards may also have to be considered.

ELECTRIC FLEXES Trailing electric flexes are dangerous, as they can result in an appliance being pulled over during a seizure, which could cause a fire.

GLASS DOORS Toughened glass is available nowadays for glass doors; low windows etc. and can greatly reduce the risk of injury if a seizure occurs nearby. Alternatively, rolls of safety film can be purchased and applied to glass surfaces to prevent dangerous splintering in the event of impact.

COOKERS Pot handles should always be turned away so that pots cannot be accidentally knocked over during seizure. A cooker guard is also a good idea. Avoid carrying dishes of hot food or liquid and take plates to the saucepan when dishing up rather than the saucepan to the plates. If cooking for a number of people use several small dishes instead of one large one to minimise the risk attached to lifting a large dish of hot food from the oven.

BATHS Water is always a potential hazard and extra care to be taken when bathing. Keep the depth of the water in the bath to just a few inches and do not use very hot water. Do not get into the bath until the taps have been turned off. A shower is a better alternative to a bath although it is not entirely risk free. To avoid the possibility of scalding if a seizure occurs ensure that the water temperature control is

effective and never use very hot water. Avoid a shower base with a high lip where water could be trapped if a fall resulted in a blocked exit pipe. If your seizures are frequent and unpredictable let someone know when you are having a bath or shower.

**BATHROOM &
TOILET DOORS**

If possible, it is wise to hang the door so that it opens outwards; then the door would not be blocked if a person fell against it. Locks are better avoided so that help can be quickly at hand if required. Some people use special safety locks that can be operated from outside in an emergency. Others find that a cardboard "engaged" notice hung over the outside door handle is all that is needed.

PILLOWS

Soft pillows can be dangerous if seizures occur at night and some people with epilepsy choose to sleep without one. Others use special safety pillows. The Epilepsy Association will be able to tell you where to get these.

TELEVISION

A small proportion of people with epilepsy are photosensitive and flashing or flickering lights may trigger off their seizures. Such people need to take special care when watching television. The set is best placed at eye level, at least three metres away from the viewer with a small illuminated lamp on top. Use a remote control for changing channels.

MEDICATION

Remember that medication is a potential hazard for small children. Pills and tablets are easily mistaken for sweets and the child who has watched a parent take medication may attempt to follow suit. Anti-epileptic drugs and other medications should be securely locked away and you need to be safety conscious about pills carried around in pockets and bags if there is an inquisitive toddler about.

IN THE GARDEN

If a parent has epilepsy and there are young children in the family it is important to make sure that the children cannot wander off unsupervised should a seizure occur. Garden gates need effective locks

SWIMMING

For the sake of their own safety, people should learn to swim and this equally applies to people with epilepsy. However, there are some special precautions that people with epilepsy need to take. Initially, it is a good idea to discuss this with your doctor and seek his/her advice.

Considerations that should be taken in to account include:

The degree to which seizures are controlled

Whether there is a warning of a seizure

Are there any triggering factors, which might occur while swimming e.g. cold water, stress and/or excitement, noise of crowded pool, dazzling lights on water surfaces etc.?

A person with epilepsy should never swim alone and should be supervised at all times by someone who can recognise a seizure starting and who can intervene and keep the person's head above water in the event of a seizure occurring. To do this it is easiest to approach the person from behind. If possible, tow the person to shallow water and hold the head above water until the seizure is over. Once the seizure is over, the swimmer should be removed to the poolside. If breathing has stopped normal resuscitation measures should be taken. If the person supervising the swimmer with epilepsy does not have lifesaving skills then the person should not seem out of the helper's depth. If the swimmer can be encouraged to wear a brightly coloured cap this will help the person supervising especially in a crowded pool. Close surveillance of someone liable to have a seizure is important. Absence attacks are very brief but the swimmer may suddenly sink. However, provided these precautions are taken, swimming is something that people with epilepsy should enjoy

KEEPING SAFETY IN PERSPECTIVE

Sometimes a diagnosis of epilepsy leads to over reaction in the family so that the person with epilepsy becomes hedged around with unnecessary restrictions. Relatives should remember that over-protection can undermine self-confidence. It is most important that people with epilepsy are encouraged to lead as full and active life as possible. Safety precautions should be sensible and relevant to the particular case of epilepsy involved.