

Advice for patients who have epilepsy and/or seizures

This leaflet is for patients who have epilepsy/experience seizures, and offers further details on how to manage your condition. Before you leave hospital we will make a care plan with you, which will include details of how to look after yourself at home and any treatment you should be taking.

It is important that your GP knows that you have been in hospital. We will send him/her a summary of your stay in hospital and we will provide you with a copy of this before you leave. You should book an appointment with your GP straightaway. You should then see your GP or practice nurse regularly for ongoing support.

What is a seizure?

A seizure is a disturbance in the electrical activity of the brain. Sometimes it can affect the whole of the brain, causing short periods of loss of consciousness or convulsions (fitting). This is a generalised seizure. Partial (or focal) seizures occur when only one part of the brain is affected. Depending on what part of the brain this is, the seizure can cause unusual sensations, emotions, behaviour or movements. Partial seizures do not cause a loss of consciousness.

Seizures are common, and having one seizure does not necessarily mean that you will have another one.

If this was your first seizure, we will refer you to a 'First Fit Clinic', where you will be seen by a specialist in the field. An electroencephalogram (EEG) may be arranged. An EEG is a painless investigation which involves placing special stickers on the scalp to record the pattern of electrical activity in the brain (similar to an ECG of the heart). The results of an EEG may help doctors when they are making a diagnosis.

How are seizures linked to epilepsy?

People with epilepsy are prone to having repeated seizures. A diagnosis of epilepsy is considered if you have had at least two seizures on separate occasions. The condition sometimes requires lifelong medications to decrease the risk of seizures from happening again.

Sometimes, people can develop seizures due to fever, excessive alcohol intake, recreational drugs or low blood sugar levels. When this happens, it is not called epilepsy.

How can I look after myself at home?

If you have been sent home from hospital with medication, it is important that you take it regularly, as this will reduce your risk of having further seizures. Suddenly stopping your medication may lead to severe rebound seizures.

If you have been diagnosed with epilepsy, you may notice certain triggers for your seizures. These may include stress, lack of sleep, heavy alcohol use or recreational drug use. Keeping a seizure diary can help identify whether certain things trigger your seizures.

You may find it helpful to tell family, friends, colleagues and gym supervisors what to expect if you experience a seizure and what action they should take to look after you. It is useful to direct them to the following website, which explains how they can help:

Web: www.epilepsy.org.uk/info/firstaid

You may choose to wear a MedicAlert® bracelet engraved with your medical condition and an emergency contact number. This informs any medical staff that may need to treat you in an emergency about your condition and any medication you require. MedicAlert® bracelets are available from a number of retailers. Ask your GP if there is one that they recommend.

Are there any precautions I need to take?

General safety

If you are prone to seizures, it is important to think about whether certain situations might compromise your safety. Here are a few suggestions to consider:

- Be careful in the kitchen when using hot pans. Do not use open fires.
- When ironing clothes, it is advisable to have someone around with you.
- Showers are safer than baths. Do not go for a swim on your own.
- It is safer not to climb ladders. You may want to place a safety rail at the top of your stairs.
- You may wish to use safety corners to cover any sharp edges around the home.
- Ensure you stand well behind yellow lines when using public overground or underground trains.
- Avoid machinery that does not cut out when dropped (hedge trimmers, for example).

Driving

Following a seizure or a diagnosis of epilepsy, you must refrain from (stop) driving and contact the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). They can give you advice on when you might be able to start driving again. If you have a diagnosis of epilepsy that affects your consciousness, this is usually after a year of being seizure-free.

Contraception and pregnancy

If you are taking medication for epilepsy and are also on the oral contraceptive pill, please seek advice from your GP. Some epilepsy medications can make the pill work less effectively and you may need a higher dose pill.

If you are taking medication for epilepsy and are thinking of becoming pregnant, you must seek advice from a specialist doctor. There is a small risk that some medicines for epilepsy can affect your unborn child.

If you find out that you are pregnant, do not stop your tablets without medical advice.

Further information

If you would like further information or advice about managing your seizures/epilepsy, you can:

- talk to your hospital team before you leave the Acute Medicine Unit or call the team on **020 8725 3143**
- speak to your GP or practice nurse
- contact Epilepsy **Action on 0808 800 5050** or visit **www.epilepsy.org.uk**
- visit **www.patient.co.uk/health/living-with-epilepsy** or **www.epilepsysociety.org.uk**

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk