

Lack of Sleep

Some triggers are common to many people with epilepsy. Lack of sleep and being tired are among them.

We have five different types of sleep and we move in and out of each state through the night. At each stage certain parts of the brain are particularly active. Sleep is important for everyone's health but it is especially important if you have epilepsy. If your sleep is disrupted it can also affect your mood, concentration and short-term memory.

Not getting enough sleep

If you don't get enough sleep, you may be more likely to have a seizure. Some types of seizures, like myoclonic seizures (sudden jerks of your arms, head or whole body), are more likely when a person is tired or just waking up. The reason why too little sleep affects seizures is unclear. We know that moving from one type of sleep to another and waking up causes significant changes in brain activity. These changes may trigger seizures. Hormonal changes that happen while you sleep may be a trigger too. Anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs) can also affect the quality of your sleep.

If you find that being tired leads to more seizures, it is important to make sure you get plenty of sleep and avoid too many late nights.

If you have trouble sleeping, speak to your doctor. This could be a side effect of the anti-epileptic medication you take. Your doctor may be able to prescribe you something that will help you sleep.

If you are feeling stressed or anxious about something in your life, this can affect your sleep as well. Finding ways to relax will help you to sleep better. You could try learning a relaxation technique such as meditation or yoga.

Ways to get a good sleep

We all know how important it is to get a sound and restful sleep. There are different things you can try to help. The main guidelines are:

1. Go to sleep and get up at regular times to help your body establish a sleep pattern.
2. Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark and kept at a comfortable temperature.
3. Avoid stimulating activities (like exercise), caffeine, nicotine, alcohol and chocolate, late in the evening.

Sleep Seizures

Studies show that around 20% of seizures happen during sleep. People with sleep seizures will often have disturbed sleep and this in turn can increase the number of seizures that they have. It is important to ensure that you get enough sleep if you have seizures during the night.

Some employers are able to change start times at work for people with sleep seizures. This is called a 'reasonable adjustment' and your employer needs to look at whether they can do this as part of the Disability Discrimination Act.

It is important to remember that having sleep seizures may mean that you are more tired during the day. Being tired is also dangerous when driving or operating machinery. It is also possible to have sleep seizures during the day if you are asleep.

Working night shifts

Some people who work night shifts have trouble sleeping during the day. If you find that being tired is likely to trigger a seizure for you, avoid working night shifts.

Ask your employer to work during the day if this is an option. Allowing you to work during the day instead of at night could be seen as a reasonable adjustment under the Disability Discrimination Act.

For more help and advice call our helpline 0808 800 2200
Or email us at enquiries@epilepsyscotland.org.uk