

(11) Parents: Safety around the house

We all face a level of risk at home irrespective of any health condition. Those with epilepsy may need to take extra precautions to keep themselves as safe as possible. This will depend on the frequency of seizures, whether the child gets a warning before a seizure, the seizure type and the severity of a child's seizures.

There are no hard and fast rules. Epilepsy is experienced in such a unique way that any information on this subject can only ever be general. If you have identified a particular risk, your child's epilepsy specialist nurse or occupational therapist is usually your first point of contact for further advice. You may also find it useful to make contact with other parents to find out how they have dealt with a particular situation. The following provides an overview of some of the areas you may want to consider.

For more detailed information on safety, particularly on bathing, call our helpline 0808 800 2200 for a free copy of our 'Staying safe with epilepsy' guide or download this from our website www.epilepsyscotland.org.uk.

Bath time

Never leave your baby or toddler alone when near water. Accidental drowning is a risk for any young child, but particularly for children who may have a seizure while bathing.

If your child is older, taking a shower is usually safer as it reduces the risk of drowning. However, a detailed assessment should be carried out first weighing up benefits and risks of a bath, also taking into account a child's individual needs, as well as the level of supervision, support and adaptations available before making a decision.

Ideally, the shower should have level access so no water can gather at the bottom. A shower chair can also make showering safer for certain types of seizures that involve sudden falling.

If you want to have a shower installed, you may get financial help from your local social work department. In order to access this, ask for a Section 23 assessment. There is more on this assessment in our Parent's factsheet 'No 12 Help from social work services'.

An older child will want privacy in the bathroom. An engaged sign can be an acceptable alternative to locking the bathroom door, but this depends on severity and frequency of seizures. Some children will require constant physical supervision. Special hinges that allow the bathroom door to be opened outwards are also available. This will help gain access to the bathroom in case a child falls and blocks the door after a seizure. Also consider:

- ✧ using a plastic shower screen instead of a glass screen
- ✧ wrapping a thick towel around any bathroom fittings which stick out
- ✧ putting down flooring made of rubber or other soft material

Sleep seizures

Sleep seizures can be a particular concern to parents as these often go unnoticed. There are a number of ways you can help to make sleeping safer for your child. Use a low bed like a futon, which can minimise the risk of injury if the child falls out of bed. Keep the bed away from walls and any furniture with sharp edges. A carpet at the side of the bed will cushion a possible fall. A seizure alarm may alert you to your child's seizure and may give you some peace of mind during the night. For more information on these alarms, see the next chapter.

You can also consider using anti-suffocation pillows. These pillows have small holes in them, but they are not generally suitable for any child under the age of two. There

are a number of sources you can obtain these from:

- ✦ **Epilepsy Sucks UK** is a UK charity who will give out free anti-suffocation pillows. Check out their website for eligibility and more information at www.esuk.uk.com
- ✦ Or you might be able to source these from commercial companies such as **Sleepsafe Products**, www.sleep-safe.co.uk (please note, inclusion in this factsheet does not constitute a recommendation)

Epilepsy alarms

An epilepsy alarm can alert a parent in another room to a child's seizure. Once alerted, you can then assist your child with basic first aid, ie turning your child onto their side and timing the seizure, or calling an ambulance if the seizure does not stop on its own. Epilepsy alarms are, however, not 100% effective and will not always pick up every seizure or may trigger a false alert.

Not all types of alarms are suitable for all types of seizures. Before you buy an alarm, a careful assessment should be made to make sure the alarm is suitable for your child's types of seizures. Your child's epilepsy specialist nurse will be able to advise and assist you with this.

You can get different kind of alarms, such as:

- ✦ alarms which function like baby monitors - they will pick up the sound a child may make before or during a seizure
- ✦ alarms which will detect movement, such as the jerking movement with tonic-clonic seizures. These alarms are placed under a child's mattress
- ✦ alarms which will detect moisture, ie when a child has emptied their bladder during a seizure

- * alarms which can monitor a child's breathing and will alert a parent if the child has stopped breathing
- * alarms that can alert a parent when a child has got out of bed

Epilepsy alarms can be expensive to buy, but there are charities or trusts which may be able to assist financially with alarms and any specialist equipment. Social work departments may also be able to fund and install an alarm following a section 23 assessment.

If you want to pay for an alarm yourself, you can try the following companies (this is not an exclusive list and inclusion does not constitute a recommendation):

- * **Sensorium** www.sensorium.co.uk
- * **Easylink** www.easylinkuk.co.uk
- * **Aremco** – alarm systems (no website) 01622 858502

Other aids and devices

If your child's seizures are well controlled there will be no need for any specialist equipment. If your child has complex epilepsy and / or other health needs, further aids and devices can sometimes make life easier.

Start with a section 23 assessment (Parent's factsheet 'No 12 Help from social work services') to try and access social work funds. This assessment will take a holistic look at anything a child may need to support their epilepsy and any other needs.

You can also do your own independent research on agencies and organisations providing information on or supplying specialist equipment such as:

- * **Disabled Living Foundation** www.dlf.org.uk
- * **Remap**, www.remap.org.uk custom made equipment for people with disabilities.

If you cannot find what you are looking for, please phone our helpline.

Safety glass

Any glass or mirrors can increase the risk of injury if seizures are sudden and unpredictable. This risk is relatively easy to make safe. Safety or toughened glass fitted to glass doors or low windows will reduce risks of injury as it is difficult to break. It also holds together if broken and does not shatter into dangerous shards. All new homes should already have safety glass fitted as this is a legal requirement.

A cheaper option is a safety film, which can be put onto each glass panel or window which a child can reach. This will hold the glass together if someone falls against it.

A mirror should be made of shatter-proof glass. If you are not sure, and unless the mirrors are high up on the wall, consider removing them. Whether this is necessary or not will also depend on the type of seizures your child has.

Protective helmets

Protective helmets are only needed if a child frequently and suddenly falls over increasing the risk of a head injury. There are some epilepsy specific helmets which can either be custom made or purchased. Most people will, however, purchase a rugby or baseball style hat which can offer some protection against injury.

It is usually the responsibility of the individual to purchase these helmets privately. Charities and trust funds may also be able to help finance a helmet, and you can do a funder's search with **Turn2Us**, 0808 802 2000 www.turn2us.org.uk.

The following commercial companies produce custom-made helmets:

- ✧ **Aremco**, (no website) Tel 01622 858502
- ✧ **R Taylor & Son**, (no website) Tel 01922 627601
- ✧ **Thudguard** www.thudguard.com

This is not an exclusive list and the **Disabled Living Foundation** www.dlf.org.uk may be able to provide you with further details of similar companies.

Stairs

Stairs can be dangerous with certain types of seizures, for example, where a child falls suddenly without any warning. A gate at an appropriate height at the top can stop a younger child from falling down the stairs, however, older children and teenagers may topple over the gate.

A gate at the bottom of stairs can sometimes stop a younger child using the stairs during a focal seizure with impaired awareness. A thick rug or carpet at the bottom of the stairs can help cushion a fall.

Some child safety experts advise that it may be safer to fit a gate at the child's room to stop a very young child from leaving their room when unsupervised.

Storing medication safely

Anti-epileptic drugs should always be stored safely and should be taken out of sight of younger siblings. If you have small children in the house keep all drugs locked away as young children can mistake them for sweeties.

Medical identification jewellery

A medical bracelet or necklace can contain helpful information about your child's epilepsy, irrespective of whether seizures are well controlled or not. Paramedics and / or the police will appreciate this basic information as this will enable them to provide the most appropriate help.

Your child may want to have a say about whether to wear this kind of jewellery, as it can be visible and may lead to bullying and name calling. A small card kept in a

wallet, pocket or bag can be more discreet. These epilepsy cards usually have space to record essential information about your child's seizures, medication taken and emergency contact details. Epilepsy Scotland can provide these cards free of charge.

Some companies will do colourful and funky designs of medical identification jewellery for children and will also sell hypoallergenic wristbands. Prices can vary widely, and it pays to shop around. The following is not an exclusive list, and other companies are available:

- ✧ **MedicAlert**, www.medicalert.org.uk
- ✧ **SOS Talisman**, www.sostalisman.co.uk
- ✧ **Medi-Tag** www.medi-tag.co.uk
- ✧ **Medical Tags**, www.medicaltags.co.uk
- ✧ **Butler & Grace**, www.butlerandgrace.co

Epilepsy Scotland cannot recommend any of the products or companies listed in this factsheet.