

# Hidden disabilities

## Epilepsy

### Reasonable Adjustments

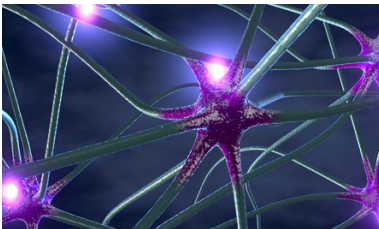
epilepsy *action*

says approximately 1 in 130 people in the UK has epilepsy



Epilepsy is a condition that affects the brain. When someone has epilepsy, it means they tend to have epileptic seizures.

There are many different types of seizure and individuals are affected very differently.



Electrical activity is happening in our brain all the time, as networks of tiny brain cells send messages to each other. These messages control all our thoughts, movements, senses and body functions.

A seizure happens when there is a sudden, intense burst of electrical activity in the brain, which causes the messages between cells to get mixed up. The result is an epileptic seizure.

How a seizure affects you depends on what area of the brain is involved in this intense electrical activity.

How?



You might lose consciousness, or you might stay aware of what's happening around you. You might have strange sensations, or movements you can't control. Or you might go stiff, fall to the floor and shake.

Some people only have one type of seizure, and some people have more than one type.



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Most people are familiar with “tonic-clonic” (“grand mal”) seizures, where the person loses consciousness, falls to the ground, and has jerking movements for a couple of minutes.

Other forms of seizure can have quite different symptoms, e.g.:

- “Atonic” (sudden loss of muscle tone causing the person to fall);
- “Myoclonic” (brief forceful jerks, which may not lead to the person falling);
- “Simple partial”, where the person remains conscious but experiences disturbances to hearing, vision, smell or taste, or other symptoms which are often not apparent to onlookers; and,
- in some people, seizures may only occur at night.

Under the law, people with any form of epilepsy may well be disqualified from driving on a temporary or permanent basis.



Anti-epileptic medication may reduce a person’s seizures significantly or remove them altogether.

In such a case, the effects on a person if they were not taking the medication is used to determine severity of disability.

The day-to-day activities most likely to be affected during a seizure will depend on its type e.g. Loss of consciousness would affect all normal day-to-day activities.



Although most seizures have severe effects when they occur, they tend to be very short (just a few minutes) and the after effects may not be very lengthy.

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Some things make seizures more likely for some people with epilepsy. These are often called triggers. Triggers do not cause epilepsy itself, but they are things that make seizures more likely.

Not all people with epilepsy have seizure triggers. And the things that trigger one person's seizures might not affect other people with epilepsy in the same way.

Here are some of the seizure triggers that have been reported by people with epilepsy:

- not taking epilepsy medicine as prescribed;
- feeling tired and not sleeping well;
- stress;
- alcohol and recreational drugs;
- flashing or flickering lights;
- monthly periods;
- missing meals; and
- having an illness which causes a high temperature.



One of the most serious effects of epilepsy is convulsive status

epilepticus.  
Convulsive status epilepticus is when:

- a tonic-clonic seizure lasts for 5 minutes or more, or
- one tonic-clonic seizure follows another without the person regaining consciousness in between.



If either of these things happen, the person needs urgent treatment to stop the status before it causes long-term damage.

If convulsive status epilepticus lasts for 30 minutes or longer it can cause permanent brain damage or even death.

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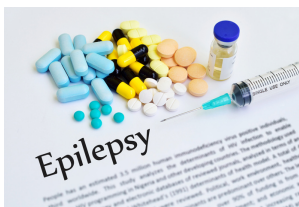
**Work Place Reasonable Adjustments: what you and your colleagues can do at your workplace**



**Adjustments depend on the nature and severity of the disability and the person should be consulted.**

**Find out if the person has triggers and support them to take action to avoid them. Some triggers can be avoided by:**

**1. Remembering to take epilepsy medicine.**



**2. Having a good sleep routine.**



**3. Trying to reduce stress.**



**4. Limiting alcohol intake.**



**5. Avoiding flashing or flickering lights (if they have photosensitive epilepsy). Always fix faulty light fittings quickly. Encourage people to report them in your service/ home / or place of employment.**

**6. Talking to their doctor if seizures follow a pattern connected to their menstrual cycle.**

**7. Eating regular meals.**

**8. Keeping an epilepsy diary to help identify triggers and highlight any valuable adjustments that can be made to the environment.**



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## NICE

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

**Everyone with epilepsy should have a care plan.**

**A care plan is an agreement between the person with epilepsy, their healthcare professional, and where appropriate, their family or carers.**

**The care plan should say how to tell if the person is in status epilepticus and what to do. It should also include details of any emergency medicine that has been prescribed, who is trained to use it and when to give it.**

**Other safety tips in the home or social places and services include:**

**1. Use guards on heaters and radiators to stop people falling directly on to them.**



**2. Install smoke detectors to let people know that food is burning if people sometimes forget what they are doing or have seizures that cause them to lose awareness.**



**3. Cover any furniture edges or corners that are sharp or stick out.**



**4. Have a shower instead of a bath.**



**5. Do not lock the bathroom door.**

**6. Place saucepans on the back burners and with the handles turned away from the edge of the cooker.**

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### Work Place Reasonable Adjustments:

#### Sports and Leisure:

Most people with epilepsy can take part in sports and other leisure activities, but there are some precautions they might need to take if their seizures are not well controlled.

- Avoid swimming or doing water sports on their own.
- Wear a helmet while cycling or horse riding.
- Avoid using certain types of gym equipment - ask staff at the gym for advice.

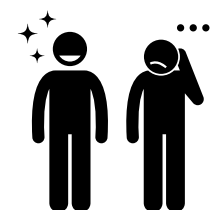


#### School and education

Children with epilepsy can usually attend a mainstream school and participate fully in school activities.

Teachers should be aware of their condition, including:

- what medication the child takes;
- how to spot and deal with a seizure; and ,
- the impact their epilepsy may have on their attendance and schoolwork - for example, epilepsy can sometimes affect behaviour and concentration.



Some children with epilepsy need extra support to get the most out of their time at school.

Encourage parents to speak to the school if their child has special educational needs so you can discuss the support your child needs and what the school can offer.



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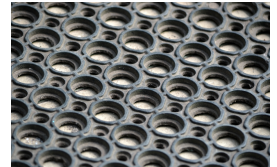


### Work Place Reasonable Adjustments:

#### Employers:

Employers need to provide safeguards against certain dangers for those whose seizures are uncontrolled. These may include:

- guards on machinery;
- protection for working at heights;
- chairs with arm rests and no casters;
- rubber mats on the floor;
- ensuring the worker does not work alone at isolated sites; and
- making sure they do not have to drive as part of their job.



#### If the worker has photosensitivity:

- avoiding fluorescent lights; and
- add an anti-glare guard on the computer; or provide a flicker-free monitor.

Where medication causes sleepiness or difficulty in waking in the mornings, employers should consider:

1. Adjusting hours and allowing breaks.

2. Letting people have extra breaks and time off for medical appointments.

3. Giving written rather than spoken instructions.



Certain jobs are subject to special rules or restrictions on the employment of people with epilepsy, eg train drivers, ambulance drivers and taxi drivers; nurses; and teachers (of certain subjects).

Employers should familiarise themselves with with these rules and restrictions.