

For men a wide range of specific issues have not been articulated in contrast to the number of specific gender issues for women. They exist and can be quite complex, varying with such things as age, seizure type and severity and with a male's overall health and lifestyle circumstances.

Men and Compliance

Taking the tablets you have been prescribed in the way your doctor has advised is known as "compliance" and it is reported as a greater issue for men than it is for women.

If you stop taking the tablets prescribed, or even decrease the dosage, you are likely to experience what are sometimes called "breakthrough seizures" and it may be harder to get your seizures back under control the second time than it was the first time.

There are many reasons why some people find compliance difficult. Some find it difficult to remember what they are to take and when they are to take it. Some dosing routines can be complicated and involve taking very specific doses of different medications throughout the day. Some people simply turn away from the adverse side effects of particular drugs.

Tablets are sometimes resented and rejected because they are associated with the "stigma" of epilepsy. This can be a critical problem for adolescents who don't want to have to explain why they take tablets. (See also *Medicating Safely*, page 12.)

Alcohol and other recreational drugs

(See *Lifestyle Issues*, page 15.)

Driving

Most professional drivers are men whether they drive trains, taxis, trams, buses or road transports. The farmer on the tractor is more likely to be a man. And one of the rites of passage for many young men is get a licence and to get some wheels. Driving and unpredictable seizures can be a lethal combination.

For older men, it is often the case that they are the only person left in the household who drives, once the children have grown up and moved out. Having epilepsy can mean that both partners have no immediate access to the car that has until now taken them shopping, visiting the kids, and even on holidays. It's something to be dealt with, and many people have successfully done so before you. The best way is to get control of your seizures so they are no longer an impediment to your safe driving. And in the meantime there may be ways that you can get some help. (See also *Driving*, page 17 and 18.)

Sport

Those men who play sport, tend to play more physically aggressive sports than women. Without freedom from seizures it is inadvisable to play rough contact sports. Head protection gear is increasingly seen as an important element to playing contact sports safely.

Participation in sports like weight lifting or bodybuilding, skydiving, mountain climbing or diving should only occur under well-supervised circumstances. (See *lifestyle issues*, page 16.)

Being a good provider

For many men the idea of supporting a family is what keeps them going to work; often at jobs for which they don't particularly care. It's the idea of being the traditional breadwinner and it's tied up with notions of male physical strength and the ability to protect those you love. Well the truth is, seizures can threaten this. They can lose you your job. They can cause you to have a serious work injury. They can leave you without an income, at home with the possibility of seizures while your partner is out earning money.

Some superannuation schemes offer periods of temporary ill health retirement. Sickness benefits and carer benefits and a range of support that you might need for a period should be talked about early in the piece so that applications can be made and arrangements thought through.

Safety in the Home

Hammers and chisels, saws and bladed tools, ladders and being the one who climbs onto the roof are all things most men deal with. And if you have epilepsy you'll need to deal with it a bit more. The advice here is if you could hurt yourself by having a seizure while doing anything with tools then you just have to adapt the activity or pass on it until you know that your seizures aren't going to happen. Fixing a leak in the roof may be sensible and you may be the only one in the house without a fear of heights, but it's a heck of a lot harder fixing a broken leg or neck. You owe it to yourself and those around you to be careful.

(See *safety issues* – pages 13 and 14)

Anger

We sometimes talk with men who have epilepsy who have been angry and whose anger has caused their marriages to break up or their friends to become distant or their colleagues to complain. It's true that everyone can get angry at a diagnosis like epilepsy. In fact it's pretty normal to feel some anger. It is important to talk about these feelings because they are manageable. The trouble is many men are not so great at dealing with emotions like these. But you can and once you do you'll learn that there's plenty that you can do to improve things.

The one thing you can't do is try to excuse anger by telling people that they just have to put up with it because you have epilepsy. Anger is a useful emotion but not if you can't keep a lid on it. Anger if left unchecked, can do you a great deal of damage. Talk to your doctor or a counsellor and get through it.

Depression

Depression is a common experience for many people, but it is known to occur more often in people with epilepsy. Depression is often associated with loss and once you have been diagnosed you may feel you have suddenly lost not only your independence but many other things which can make life worth living. It is true your life will be altered but it is a matter of adjustment rather than despair. Talking is a great help whether to family, friends or professionals. For more information about depression and epilepsy ask your local epilepsy association.

Sex

While some seizures [central or parietal lobe seizures] can involve sexual feelings and actually cause erections and ejaculation, the experience of epilepsy is more likely to lead to a decline in sexual energy or libido rather than an increase. The culprit most often blamed is the sedating effect of many antiepileptic drugs. While this can be a difficulty, for many men the fatigue from the drugs usually wears off or at least becomes quite manageable. What is now understood however is that the mechanisms of seizures can be implicated in reduced libido [or sexual drive] and reduced sexual function [potency] even without the added impact that some medications bring into the picture.

Of course if your libido has decreased you might not be too fussed about it. But your partner may be. There is a range of things that you can do to help ensure that you are functioning optimally. All men face issues around libido and potency at different times and the first thing you need to do is to reduce all the other factors that can diminish your sexual prowess. This means you need to attend to exercise, diet, sleep, minimising stress and concentrating on your partner's needs as well as your own. Remember also that it is not necessarily your epilepsy or its treatment that is causing the difficulty.

There is a range of solutions to impotence and newer drugs such as Viagra appear to be compatible with antiepileptic medications. If such drugs help it is likely that they are redressing difficulties that are not based on epilepsy but are the same difficulties that millions of other men without epilepsy experience.

Your doctor or neurologist is increasingly in a position to be able to tell you whether your tablets or something else is the problem. This area of research is relatively new.

Can having sex provoke seizures?

Many men wonder if sexual activity can provoke seizures. The answer is that it is unlikely to do so. In fact an active sex life can have a decided stress reducing effect just as the lack of one can cause some guys to become quite stressed out. If you are in a slump since being diagnosed with epilepsy tell your doctor what's happening.

Don't forget, if you are in a sexual relationship, your partner may want to reassure you of their love and support and may be frustrated by your lack of interest. So it's important to talk. It's not only OK to say the tablets make you tired, it's important to let your partner in on what's happening. Closing off from your partner at a time when things are tough may well be a more certain way of wrecking a good relationship than having to work through the issues of drug side effects and anxieties about sex.

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Will I pass epilepsy on to my children?

The risk is substantially higher if the mother has epilepsy than if the father does. Risk is either the same or slightly higher in children of fathers with epilepsy than in the general population.

Epilepsy is a serious health condition and being a man doesn't mean you have to tough it out!