

## A guide for jobseekers

You need a good deal of preparation and planning to find a job in today's competitive labour market. Every jobseeker should have a jobsearch strategy. If you have epilepsy, you may also have to consider some additional issues.

### Developing a jobsearch strategy

Before you start looking for a job, you will need answers to the following questions:

- What do you want to do?
- What are your strengths and what can you offer an employer?

It helps to choose something you will enjoy doing rather than taking the first thing that comes along. Seeking advice from someone who does the kind of work you are interested in can also help.

It may seem obvious, but an employer will be more likely to employ you if you have a genuine interest in the job. It is also important to be realistic about your ambitions. You may become frustrated and disheartened if you seek a job for which you are unqualified or unsuited.

Your epilepsy should not influence your choice of work unless there are obvious hazards involved in that area.

In most cases, people with epilepsy are not permitted to drive commercial vehicles, fly aeroplanes, join the Police Force or Armed Forces.

### Making the most of your jobsearch

Securing a job involves more than just looking in the paper or sending off 100 resumes every week. A well-prepared jobsearch strategy gives you the edge over other jobseekers and helps you make the most of your time.

You will also gain confidence because you know what you are going to do and how you are going to do it. Your jobsearch strategy may include:

- Preparing a script so you know what you are going to say to employers on the telephone, in letters and in person.
- A commitment to make at least three personal visits to employers every week.
- An undertaking to make at least three telephone calls to employers every day.
- Regularly visiting job centres, reading newspapers and contacting employers.

### The hidden job market

A large number of job vacancies are not even advertised. These jobs form the 'hidden job market' which you can only access by actively seeking out vacancies.

This involves:

- Asking family, friends and acquaintances to be your eyes and ears in the job market.
- Approaching employers in person as well as the usual telephone and letter applications.
- Keeping records of employers you have approached and recontacting them after a month or so.

### Jobsearch services

There is no shortage of services available to help you find work but you must be willing to go out and use them. Libraries, job centres, youth access centres and a range of government sponsored training courses are there to assist you.

### Should I tell an employer about my epilepsy?

In deciding whether or not to disclose your epilepsy, consider the following questions:

- Will my epilepsy affect my ability to carry out my work?
- Is my employer likely to find out, whether I tell them or not?
- Do my workmates need to know in case I have a seizure at work?

If you think an employer needs to know that you have epilepsy, then it is better to tell them rather than to have them find out for themselves. If your seizures are so infrequent that they don't interfere with your work, then you may decide that the employer does not need to know.

### How do I tell an employer I have epilepsy?

The way you react to your epilepsy and learn to deal with it will often determine the reactions of others, including employers. Many people fear discrimination if they disclose their epilepsy. However, HOW you tell an employer will often determine their reaction.

Being prepared to talk openly and to explain your epilepsy at interviews is better than simply stating that you have epilepsy. By understanding the employer's concerns and addressing them, you can give yourself a better chance of securing the job. You are also giving the employer an opportunity to understand your situation.

It is important for you to keep your epilepsy in perspective. After all, a job interview is all about your ability to do the job.

## What concerns might employers have?

**Workcover:** Some employers mistakenly think that their WorkCover premiums will go up if they employ someone with epilepsy. Premiums are only affected by claims. There is no evidence to suggest that claims will increase by employing a person with epilepsy.

**Sick Leave:** Having epilepsy does not automatically mean more time off work nor does it make people less reliable. A common cold or the flu is likely to account for more sick leave than any time taken off due to seizures.

**Accidents:** People with epilepsy are generally very careful about their own well-being and are no more prone to accidents than anyone else. Research indicates that workers who have epilepsy are more aware of potential hazards and so they are less likely to have an accident at work.

**Discrimination:** Both State Equal Opportunity Acts and the Federal Disability Discrimination Act legally protect people with epilepsy from discrimination. You are entitled to take legal action if you believe you have been discriminated against because of your epilepsy.

Time of Disclosure	Advantages	Disadvantages	Issues
<b>On a Job Application</b>	Honesty/peace of mind. Easy. Lets employer decide if epilepsy is an issue.	Might disqualify you with no opportunity to present yourself and your qualifications and no recourse.	If you use this technique, you may have a harder time finding work, but usually have no epilepsy-related problems when you do.
<b>During an Interview</b>	Honesty/peace of mind. Opportunity to respond briefly and positively – in person – to specific epilepsy issues. Discrimination less likely face-to-face.	Puts responsibility on you to handle epilepsy issues in a clear, non-threatening way. Too much emphasis on issue indicates possible problem. You are not being evaluated on your abilities.	How comfortable are you with discussing your epilepsy? Are you too preoccupied with epilepsy? These are very difficult questions, but ones that you can prepare to answer.
<b>After the Interview (when a job is offered but before you begin work)</b>	Honesty/peace of mind. If the epilepsy information changes the hiring decision and you are sure that your seizures will not interfere with your ability to perform the job, there may be legal recourse.	Employer might feel you should have told him before the hiring decision was made. Might lead to distrust with personnel department.	Need to evaluate seizure condition honestly in light of the specific tasks of the job being applied for. Need to be able to explain how epilepsy will not interfere with ability to perform job. This includes job safety.
<b>After You Start Work</b>	Opportunity to prove yourself on job before disclosure. Allows you to respond to epilepsy questions with peers at work. If disclosure affects employment status and the condition doesn't affect ability to perform job or job safety, you may be protected by law.	Nervousness or fear of having a seizure on the job. Possible employer accusation of falsifying your application. Possibility of a seizure before co-workers know how to react. Could change interaction with peers.	The longer you put off disclosing, the harder it becomes. It may be difficult to identify whom to tell.
<b>After a Seizure on the Job</b>	Opportunity to prove yourself on job before disclosure. If seizure affects employment status but the seizures do not affect your ability to perform your job or job safety, you may be protected by law.	Possible employer accusation of falsifying your application. Possibility that your co-workers will not have known how to react to your seizures. Can perpetuate epilepsy myths and misunderstandings.	Relationships you establish with co-workers may be hurt if they feel you have been untruthful with them. It may be difficult to re-establish trust.
<b>Never</b>	Employer can't react to your epilepsy unless you have a seizure.	If epilepsy is discovered, you run the risk of being fired. Nervousness and fear of having a seizure on the job. If you have a seizure, might be hurt by inappropriate first aid. Studies show that people who don't disclose have a higher incidence of seizures on the job. Can perpetuate epilepsy myths and misunderstanding.	If you haven't had a seizure for a long time (over two years) the issues of disclosure become less critical.