

# Managing Seizure Medicines and Triggers

## Take medication as prescribed

Taking medicines daily can be hard to remember. Sometimes medicine schedules are complex and hard to follow, especially if medicines are taken many times a day. If a student is new to seizures, talk to the family and health care team about what to expect with the new medicine. Make sure you know details of what the student is taking, how often, when, and if any changes are planned.

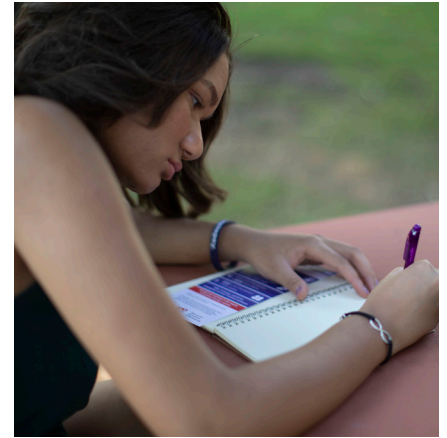
- Work with the student and family if possible so they know how to take medicine.
- Check medicine and pill sizes to know if they have the right one and correct dose.
- Follow special instruction for different forms of seizure medicines.
- Set times to take medicines as prescribed.
- Recognize side effects and when to tell their epilepsy provider.
- Get blood tests done if needed.
- Track if medicines are working.

## What are seizure triggers?

Some people find that certain situations, habits, health problems, or medications can affect their seizures. For example, not sleeping well or too much stress can make some people more likely to have a seizure. Missing doses of seizure medicine makes a person likely to have more seizures and is a common cause of breakthrough seizures and emergencies.

Talk to the student and family about any known or possible triggers. Some examples of seizure triggers include:

- Missing seizure medicine or stopping them suddenly
- Not getting enough sleep or not good quality sleep
- Stress
- Being sick with another illness or fever
- Flashing lights in people who are photosensitive
- Menstrual cycles or other hormonal changes
- Alcohol or drug use (Too much alcohol can make a person more likely to have seizures, especially the day after drinking.)
- Certain prescription or over-the-counter medicines
- Some herbal products or supplements
- Low levels of certain minerals or substances in the body (for example, low levels of sodium or salt, magnesium, or calcium)



## Encourage students to not give up!

Getting the best seizure control possible is one step towards improving health and lessening the risk for SUDEP. Encourage students not to give up or settle for life with continued seizures. If a student continues to have seizures and side effects, find out if they have been seen by an epilepsy specialist.

Some people with certain types of epilepsy find it very hard to control their seizures. They may also have other problems that affect their ability to move, feel, think, talk, and do other things. These other problems are often called comorbidities and can make managing epilepsy more difficult. Being seen at a comprehensive epilepsy center may help look at all options to improve seizure control and how epilepsy affects your health and quality of life.

## How can a school nurse or other personnel help manage triggers?

Keep track of them over time and see how often they happen. If they often happen before seizures, talk to the family and epilepsy team about ways to avoid the trigger or adapt the student's schedule or activity if possible.

Assess if any triggers affect a student's learning or activities at school. Talk to the family about adding triggers and their impact to 504 plans or individualized education programs.

Here are examples of things that can help students manage triggers and stay healthy. Having healthy daily routines also can help improve seizure control.

- Keeping a regular sleep pattern – go to bed and get up at the same time each day.
- Drinking plenty of fluids and staying hydrated. Make sure coaches and other after-school instructors know this too.
- Paying attention to overall emotional health. Refer a student for counseling if needed.
- Eating regularly and have a healthy diet. Know how to help a student on a special diet for epilepsy treatment (ie. ketogenic diet)
- Having a strong support system of family and friends. Watch out for bullying.
- Exercising in a safe manner; avoid getting overheated, overtired, or dehydrated.
- Look at how they cope with stress – talk with others; give and get support!

## Help for stress management

Many people with epilepsy think that emotional stress may affect their seizures. Or maybe stress can affect how they sleep, eat, or feel in general. Some may notice times they feel scared, worried, sad, or depressed separate from their seizures. A few tips to think about:

- Talk with students about how they feel. Encourage them to tell the school nurse, family and epilepsy team if their mood changes.
- Teach deep breathing, meditation, exercise, or other ways to help relax and manage stress.
- Talk to family and health care team if trouble sleeping happens. Sleep problems can trigger seizures or be a symptom of something else.
- If mood changes continue or last longer than a few weeks, talk to family, school counselors, and/ or health care team for mental health screening and treatment.

## Special notes for females

- About half of females of childbearing age who have epilepsy report more seizures around the time of their menses or in the middle of their cycle. Keeping track of when seizures occur can help women find out if there are any connections. Talk with the care team if other testing is needed. For some women, this could lead to other ways to improve seizure control.
- Some seizure medicines may interact with hormonal birth control. This could lead to an unplanned pregnancy. Counsel females with epilepsy to talk to their neurology/epilepsy team about birth control too.

Disclaimer: This publication is designed to provide general information about epilepsy and seizures to the public. It is not intended as medical advice.

People with epilepsy should not make changes to treatment or activities based on this information without first consulting their health care provider.

This publication is made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) under cooperative grant agreement number 1NU58DPO06256-04-00. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the Epilepsy Foundation and do not necessarily represent the views of the CDC.

About the Foundation: The Epilepsy Foundation, and its network of 50 organizations throughout the United States, leads the fight to overcome the challenges of living with epilepsy and to accelerate therapies to stop seizures, find cures, and save lives. To learn more, please visit [epilepsy.com](http://epilepsy.com).