

LIFESTYLE

Physical Activity and Epilepsy

People with epilepsy can safely participate in many physical activities. In fact, regular exercise and physical activity are encouraged. People with epilepsy achieve the same benefits from regular physical activity as people without epilepsy.

BENEFITS OF REGULAR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Improved:

- Self-esteem
- Quality of life
- Ability to manage stress
- Weight control
- Overall health

Increased:

- Positive mood
- Muscle strength (prevents muscle loss)
- Flexibility
- Endurance

Decreased:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Other negative emotions

BONUS - Physical Activity:

- Helps maintain an active social life
- Can potentially create a higher seizure threshold

- Moderate to vigorous activity means that you can speak, but not have a full conversation without losing your breath. You should be sweating and breathing heavily.
- Stop exercising if you feel faint, nauseous, or extremely hot.
- Stay hydrated – drink water before, during, and especially after exercise.
- Ensure you have eaten a nutritious meal before exercise to help maintain blood sugar levels.
- Take at least two days of rest a week.
- Inform your friends, teammates, and/or coaches of your epilepsy and your first aid protocol.
- If you are going for a walk or jog, inform someone of your route and how long you are expected to be out.
- Wear or carry something that identifies your epilepsy and first aid protocol.
- Take your medications as directed while engaging in regular physical activity.
- Wear protective gear associated with your activity (i.e. a helmet when biking or roller skating, etc.).

■ Tips for Engaging in Physical Activity

- Talk to your doctor about completing a pre-exercise assessment (PAR-Q)
- Focus on aerobic exercise that uses large muscle groups; and exercise 3-5 times per week for 20-40 minutes.
- If 20 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity is too challenging, short bouts of exercise for a total of 20 minutes a day is a good starting point.

Physical Activity and Epilepsy *continued*

■ Simple Ways to Incorporate Physical Activity Into Your Day

- Walk to your destination or get off the bus a few stops further from your destination.
- Find a local walking or jogging group and make some friends while you exercise!
- Try out a beginner fitness class, such as Zumba, yoga, or Pilates.
- Volunteer your time by walking dogs at your local SPCA.
- Housework such as vacuuming, raking leaves, and shoveling snow counts as physical activity too!

FACT: People with epilepsy have fewer seizures while exercising than they do while resting.¹

■ Low Risk Activities

- Walking or jogging
- Group fitness classes
- Yoga
- Pilates
- Weight lifting
- Tennis
- Volleyball
- Cross country skiing
- Basketball
- Hiking
- Baseball
- Golfing

TIP: Activities like walking can improve bone density, which is important for people with epilepsy who may have a greater risk of osteoporosis.

■ Medium Risk Activities

These sports have safety precautions you should take, but you can still enjoy them.

- Contact sports such as hockey, soccer, boxing, karate, or football.
 - Take precaution and inform your coach and teammates of your epilepsy and seizure protocol.
 - Wear appropriate equipment, such as a helmet.
- Water sports
 - Always wear a life jacket.
 - Never participate in these activities alone.

■ Risky Activities

These activities are not recommended for people with epilepsy, particularly those with uncontrolled seizures.

- High altitude activities such as rock/mountain climbing
- Scuba diving
- Parachuting

This material is intended to provide basic information about epilepsy to the general public. It is not intended to, nor does it, constitute medical advice. Readers are warned against changing medical schedules or life activities based on the information it contains without first consulting a physician.

¹ Arida, R. M., Scorza, F. A. & Abrão Cavalheiro, E. (2010). *Favourable Effects of Physical Activity for Recovery.*

Physical Activity and Epilepsy *continued*

References

Arida, R. M., Cavalheiro, E. A., Silva, A. C. d., & Scorza, F. A. (2008). Physical activity and epilepsy: Proven and predicted benefits. *Sports Medicine*, 38(7), 607.

Arida, R. M., Scorza, F. A., Gomes da Silvaa, S., Schachterc, S. C., & Abrão Cavalheirob, E. (2010). The potential role of physical exercise in the treatment of epilepsy. *Epilepsy and Behavior*, 17(4), 432.

Arida, R. M., Scorza, F. A. & Abrão Cavalheirob, E. (2010). Favourable Effects of Physical Activity for Recovery. *Epilepsia*, 51 (Suppl. 3), 76.

Better Health Channel (2014). Epilepsy and Exercise Fact Sheet. Retrieved from:
[http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcvpdf.nsf/ByPDF/Epilepsy_and_exercise/\\$File/Epilepsy_and_exercise.pdf](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcvpdf.nsf/ByPDF/Epilepsy_and_exercise/$File/Epilepsy_and_exercise.pdf)

Edmonton Epilepsy Association (2011) Living with Epilepsy, Epilepsy Education Series

Green, Jennifer. Exercise programming and sports participation for individuals with epilepsy, NCHPAD. Retrieved from:
<http://www.nchpad.org/916/5038/Exercise~Programming~and~Sports~Participation~for~Individuals~with~Epilepsy>

Prepared by Tabitha Vercillo, MA, CTRS.

Version Date: July 2015