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# Living well with epilepsy

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Nutritious food, dignified housing, clean air and water, sufficient physical activity, rest, and love—these things help everyone lead a healthy life, including people with epilepsy.

## Physical activity and exercise help our bodies

Our bodies work better when we are physically active. When you exercise, you can feel your heart beat faster, your blood circulate more strongly, your muscles stretch and contract, and your lungs breathe deeply.

Exercising helps oxygen from the air we breathe and nutrients from the food we eat reach our lungs, brain, heart, bones, muscles, and skin. Regular activity reduces the body's risk of infection and illness and helps prevent pain. When you exercise regularly, your body produces chemicals that balance your mood and improve sleep.

Exercise is just as important for people with epilepsy as it is for people without epilepsy. Exercise hardly ever makes seizures worse, and it helps people who take daily antiseizure medicine reduce side effects like tiredness, sleepiness, and increased body weight.

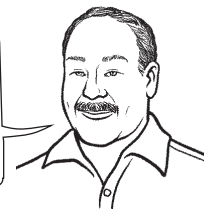
Everyone benefits from having accessible, safe, and attractive places where they can exercise and stay physically active. Encouraging physical activity can also include educating and sharing information about the importance and safety of physical activity.

Regular physical activity makes the body stronger. This strength can decrease seizures triggered by strains on the body. For example, physical activity can strengthen the body of a person with epilepsy to handle tasks like lifting heavy things or keeping up with an active child. When exercise is done safely, it can build self-confidence, and triggers can be avoided and managed.



*It's hard to take that "first step" to start exercising. It seems easier for people without epilepsy...*

*The first few days might feel hard, so start slowly. You'll feel more confident and stronger soon!*



## Make it about movement

Walking around your neighborhood, cycling or walking to work, gardening, and doing household chores are all things we do in our daily lives that keep us physically active. You can build upon daily life activities to get the exercise you need.

**Household chores:** Cleaning your home, fetching water, firewood, and groceries, washing and hanging clothes to dry, preparing meals, gardening...

**Childcare:** Lifting, carrying, bathing, and playing with children, tidying spaces and toys, walking children to and from school...

**Farming:** Clearing fields, digging and planting, weeding, harvesting your produce, cleaning and processing maize (corn), wheat, rice, and other crops...

**Sports and social activities:** Football, volleyball, ping pong, cricket, track and field events, jogging, jumping rope, dancing...

Spending less time on screens and moving your body more will help you feel happier and have more energy for your day. Even small amounts of movement can make daily life easier.



Doing physical activities with others can be fun too, like playing group sports and games, swimming, cycling, or simply taking a walk with friends and family.

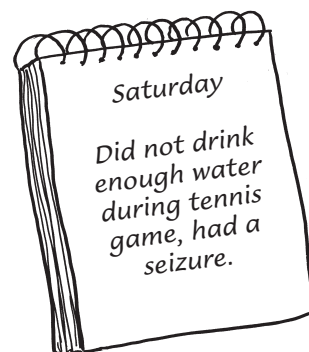
## Making physical activity and exercise safer

A seizure during or after physical activity might be triggered by different conditions. Tiredness, hot temperatures, dehydration, hunger, low blood sugar, and not taking medicines on time can all cause seizures for some people.

Pay attention to conditions or activities that seem to trigger seizures. Seizures can be prevented or avoided by modifying those activities or conditions.



*Keep track of your seizures by noting the situation and your activities before the seizure. This can help you identify your seizure patterns so you can make changes to avoid seizure triggers.*



To prevent seizures during physical activity:

- Take medicines as directed.
- Drink water before, during (every 15 to 20 minutes), and after exercise.
- Eat a light snack about 1 hour before beginning. Nutritious snacks include bananas, apples, oranges and other fruits, and yogurt or milk. Nuts and seeds are also great because they release energy slowly.

If a specific physical activity triggers your seizures:

- Decrease the intensity of the activity and the length of time you do the activity.
- Try a different physical activity that is gentler on your body.

When a seizure happens during or soon after a physical activity you enjoy, it can be disappointing and difficult to resume the activity. Ask for support from a friend or family member to help you try again or choose a different activity.



*When my brother has a seizure during exercise, I remind him to slow down and help him get his confidence back. I also remind him that it is OK to take breaks when he needs them—his safety is important!*

## Get a buddy for safety, support, and encouragement

A buddy can be a friend, family member, or anyone willing to pair up with you for support, assistance, and encouragement during physical activity. A buddy can help provide:

**Physical safety:** A buddy can make sure you are physically safe and protected from injury, especially if you have a seizure. For information about seizure first aid, see Chapter 2.

**More fun:** Activity is usually more fun when shared with others.

**Encouragement:** A buddy can encourage and remind you to stay active. They can help you solve problems that get in the way of your activity.

**Skills and learnings:** An experienced buddy can help you develop skills and avoid mistakes. If your buddy also has epilepsy, they can share their experience about how best to stay active. If your buddy does not have epilepsy, they can learn about it from you.

A buddy doesn't have to be the same person all the time. Sometimes a friend can join you for a walk, a family member can check in on you, or a neighbor can look out for you. Different people help in different ways. Some give emotional support, some help you feel safe, and others can stand up for you if anyone tries to limit your participation in physical activities.

By letting someone know where you're going and when you'll be back, a buddy can check on you if needed. A buddy is there for support, however you choose.

## Let people know you have epilepsy

Stigma sometimes prevents people from letting others know they have epilepsy and might have a seizure. Especially for times when you are not with a buddy or someone who knows and understands your epilepsy, it is good to wear an identification tag or have information visible on your phone.

**Epilepsy ID bracelet, necklace, card, or tag.** Make an ID necklace or a bracelet to wear on your wrist or ankle. Or hang a card on your bag or keychain, or keep one in your pocket. Whatever you choose, make sure the ID clearly says Epilepsy, or "I have epilepsy," and includes the name of an emergency contact and, if you use one, an emergency medicine. This will help others help you.

