

Epilepsy

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)



INDIAN ACADEMY OF
NEUROLOGY

A Public Information Initiative

Q. 1. At what age does epilepsy start?

Ans. Epilepsy can start at any age, but it is more common in children and in elderly people over 60 years of age. Even the affected individuals with birth defects can develop epilepsy at any later age.

Q. 2. What are the common causes of epilepsy in India?

Ans. Brain injuries at the time of child birth, brain infections such as meningitis and encephalitis, neurocysticercosis and tuberculosis, and strokes are some of the common causes of epilepsy in our country.

Q. 3. What can one do to prevent epilepsy?

Ans. One cannot prevent all types of epilepsy, but can definitely take precautions to prevent certain conditions which can cause epilepsy. One should ensure proper prenatal and perinatal care to prevent birth injuries, proper immunization to prevent infections like meningitis, regular and healthy life-style with avoidance of smoking and alcohol, and proper treatment of hypertension and diabetes to prevent strokes.

Q. 4. Is epilepsy hereditary?

Ans. In a majority of cases, epilepsy is not hereditary and does not pass on to children. Only certain types of epilepsies, approximately, less than five percent of cases, are hereditary.

Q. 5. How can I help my child with epilepsy?

Ans. One should try to be as normal as possible with the child without being overprotective. One should patiently explain to the child about the nature of the illness and a few restrictions to be followed. Give the medicines regularly to the child, ensure regular and proper sleep, and take the child to safe outdoor activities. Talk to the teacher about the nature of illness and be patient with the child while teaching.

Q. 6. Will medicines produce any side-effects if I take them for long-term?

Ans. Majority of the medicines are safe and do not produce any long-term side-effects or damage to body organs. Most medicines produce short-term side effects at high doses or when the medicines are too many in number. These can be managed by the treating doctor who can simplify the treatment regimen by reducing the dose or the number of medicines.

Q. 7. When should I consider the option of epilepsy surgery?

Ans. Epilepsy surgery is considered in those cases where seizures cannot be controlled by medicines. If your seizures are not controlled with proper doses of one or at-the-most two medicines, then you should consider the option of epilepsy surgery and discuss it with your treating neurologist. Please note that surgery is not considered if your seizures are well-controlled with medicines.

Q. 8. How effective and safe is epilepsy surgery?

Ans. In appropriately selected persons affected with epilepsy, seizures may be completely stopped in 50-80% of the affected individuals after epilepsy surgery. After 2-3 years of surgery, medicines can also

be stopped in 30-50% of people with epilepsy. Epilepsy surgery is safe, and complication rate is less than one percent which is similar to any other brain or other organ surgery.

Q.9. Should I disclose about my epilepsy before marriage, to my fiancée and his/her family members?

Ans. Although disclosing can have some problems, it is always better to disclose about epilepsy before marriage to avoid any future troubles. Be confident and honest while sharing information about your disease. In our country, it is also important for women to be employed so that they are financially empowered and can take independent decisions.

Q.10. Will epilepsy or antiepileptic drugs affect my pregnancy and future child?

Ans. It is true that some medicines can cause problems to the child if they are taken during pregnancy. However, this occurs in less than 5% of pregnancies. Most pregnancies in women with epilepsy result in delivery of healthy normal children. The risk is increased with increased number of medicines and higher doses. Hence, appropriate treatment with minimal medicines and doses should be adjusted before planning the pregnancy. Regular intake of folic acid during pregnancy also helps to reduce the risk to the child.

Q.11. What should I do when a person is having fits?

Ans. Majority (>95%) of seizures are self-limiting and stop within 1-2 minutes. During a fit, one should take the following first-aid precautions:

- Do not over-react to a seizure event. Be calm and give assurance to people around.
- Keep the person on one side to allow the secretions from the mouth to flow out.
- Remove any sharp objects in the surroundings that may hurt the affected person.
- Do not put any hard object in the mouth or hands.
- Loosen tight clothing and remove spectacles.
- Do not give anything to eat or drink till the affected person regains full consciousness.
- Arrange for medical care if a seizure lasts for more than five minutes, or there are recurrent seizures and the person is not regaining consciousness in-between the seizures.

Q.12. What precautions should I take for effective seizure control and better quality of life?

Ans: Following certain precautions, one can lead an improved quality of life:

- Take your medication regularly as advised by your doctor.
- Identify your seizure triggers and try to avoid them.
- Follow a regular sleep pattern and avoid sleep deprivation.
- Maintain regular food habits and avoid fasting.
- Avoid undue stress, alcoholism, smoking, or weight gain.
- Develop a positive mental attitude, be happy, and be as active as possible.

Q.13. I am feeling very depressed. What should I do?

Ans. Depression and other psychiatric problems are common in people with epilepsy. Discuss the problems with your neurologist who will guide you about further treatment. Majority of these problems

can be treated with counseling and medicines. Have a positive attitude about life. Consider epilepsy as just one aspect of your life, accept it and learn to live with it.

Q.14. My child is hyperactive and poor in studies. What should I do?

Ans. Attention deficits and hyperactivity are common in children with epilepsy. This can be managed with behavioral therapy and, in some cases, with medicines. It may require help from multiple sources such as, a child psychologist, a speech therapist and an occupational therapist. You can also discuss the need for special schooling if your child is not able to cope with regular school.

Q.15. Can I lead a normal life with epilepsy?

Ans. Because of the intermittent and unpredictable nature of seizures, epilepsy can restrict some activities like driving and active socializing. However, with proper treatment, epilepsy can be well controlled in more than 70% of patients. These people can lead completely normal lives without any restrictions. Even people who have uncontrolled epilepsy can lead normal life with few minor restrictions.

Disclaimer:

This brochure is for the general information of the public and the patients. People should not self-medicate themselves with the medicines and treatments mentioned here. Before taking any of the medications mentioned in the information brochure, please consult your neurologist.

Dr. Chaturbhuji Rathore, MD, DM



**INDIAN ACADEMY OF
NEUROLOGY**