

## Seizure Triggers

A seizure trigger is something that can make it more likely to have a seizure, mainly if you already have a history of seizures. You cannot predict them. Most people don't know what causes them. Many people with epilepsy **do not** have seizure triggers. It varies with each person.

There are certain "seizure triggers" that can increase your chance of having a seizure even if taking medicine. This sheet is to inform you of things that may trigger seizures.

### **Missing Doses**

The most common trigger is missing doses of your antiseizure medicine. It works best when taken every day, around the same time. This can result in a stable level of the drug in your blood.

### **Alcohol and Drugs**

Too much alcohol or certain drugs (such as cocaine, ecstasy), or a sudden stop of either can trigger seizures. Some prescribed medicine, over the counter or herbal medicine may also trigger seizures because they lower your seizure threshold. Always check with your pharmacist when starting a new medicine to see if it will affect your seizure medicine.

### **Lack of Sleep**

This is a known seizure trigger. We suggest a regular sleep pattern, avoiding late nights, and not going without sleep if you can. You should also seek treatment for sleep apnea or other causes of chronic sleep loss to decrease the risk of breakthrough seizures.

### **Illness**

Infections, vomiting, diarrhea and fever can also lower your seizure threshold, making it more likely to have a breakthrough seizure. Contact the clinic if you have concerns about not being able to keep medicines down during illness.

### **Hormones**

For some people hormones can trigger seizures at certain times in their monthly menstrual cycle, often during the premenstrual or ovulating phases. Discuss any changes that may help reduce seizures during your monthly cycle with your Neurologist and Primary Care Doctor. Also let your Neurologist know if you start or change hormonal contraception because sometimes it can affect the levels of your antiseizure medicine.

### **Stress**

Many people with epilepsy report that emotional stress and anxiety can be a seizure trigger, mainly when you are very tired or lack sleep. Therapy and taking part in support groups may help you find ways to relax, decrease stress and anxiety, improve coping skills and your quality of life.

### **Sensory Input**

Some people who have "Reflex Epilepsy," have seizures that are caused by other sources. Such as a light that flickers or flashes, music, reading, math, touch, and soaking in hot water. Once the trigger is known, you should avoid it and take your medicine.

### **Keep Track**

You should keep precise records and include details of what occurred before the seizure. This can help to point to the likely trigger. One great way of doing this is by keeping a seizure diary. If you record your seizures, it will be helpful to track the pattern and find the triggers that you may be able to avoid.

This will improve your quality of life. Try **not** to increase your seizure medicine, it is better to detect seizure triggers and avoid them. Increase doses of medicine may also increase your chance of side effects.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 1/2023. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7321