

Seizure Triggers

A **seizure trigger** is something that can make a seizure more likely in someone who has had seizures before. Some triggers can raise your chance of a seizure, even if you take medicine. You can not always predict when a seizure will happen. Many people do not know what causes their seizures, and some people do not have any triggers. Triggers are different for each person. Read this handout to learn what may cause a seizure.

Missing Doses

Missing doses of your anti-seizure medicine is the most common trigger. Take your medicine every day, at the same time. This helps keep a steady level of the medicine in your blood.

Alcohol and Drugs

Alcohol and some drugs can trigger seizures. This includes drugs like cocaine and ecstasy. Stopping alcohol or drugs all at once can also trigger a seizure.

Some medicines can also make seizures more likely and affect how they work. This includes:

- Prescribed medicine
- Over-the-counter medicine
- Herbal medicine

Talk to your pharmacist before you start any new medicine. This helps make sure it is safe with your seizure medicine.

Lack of Sleep

This is a known seizure trigger. We suggest a regular sleep pattern, avoiding late nights, and trying not to miss sleep. You should also seek treatment for sleep apnea or other causes of chronic sleep loss to decrease the risk of breakthrough seizures.

Illness

Being sick can make seizures more likely.

Common triggers include:

- Infection
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Fever

Call the clinic if you are sick and can not keep your medicine down.

Hormones

Hormones can trigger seizures for some people. This may happen at certain times in the monthly cycle, such as before a period or during ovulation.

Talk with your neurologist and primary care provider about ways to lower your risk during your cycle. Let your care team know if you start or change hormone birth control. This can affect the level of your seizure medicine.

Sensory Input

Some people who have “reflex epilepsy,” have seizures that are caused by other sources. Examples include:

- Light that flickers or flashes
- Music
- Reading
- Math
- Touch
- Soaking in hot water

Once the trigger is known, you should avoid it and take your medicine.

Stress

Many people with epilepsy report that stress and anxiety can be a seizure trigger. Therapy and support groups can help you relax. They

can lower stress and anxiety, help you cope better and improve your quality of life.

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. Increasing doses of medicine may also increase your chance of side effects.

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 © 5/2026. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7321