

# Youth & Epilepsy

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# Being Positive

**M**ost of the time, the way you handle difficult situations determines your end results. Keep an open mind: don't dwell on the negative sides of things. You may dislike taking your medication and feel that it sets you apart from others. Maybe having to take medication daily does set you apart from your peers, but for the rest of the time you are a regular adolescent. When you are not taking medicine or having a seizure, would anyone be able to pick you out of the crowd and label you as being "different"? Probably not. What makes you "unique" is your personality, attitudes towards life, and how you are able to conquer difficult situations; your health history alone does not make you different.

Keeping an open mind not only makes you feel good: it influences people around you as well. When a person is cheerful and is able to handle situations, it starts to rub off on other people. The opposite is also true: a "sour apple" also has an effect on others.

## Try it: be positive!

- ∅ Gain a higher self-esteem.
- ∅ Do something. Don't just sitting around feeling sorry for yourself.
- ∅ Find greater meaning in your life.
- ∅ Have more fun.
- ∅ Attempt goals with the attitude of "I will achieve my target if I try 100%", instead of "there's no use in trying because I can't do it anyway".
- ∅ Be more outgoing; you will be more likely to meet new friends.
- ∅ Broaden your horizons. Being optimistic will allow you to look beyond what you know. You will be more willing to experience new things and may discover new opportunities.

## Famous Quotes

"The future belongs to those  
Who believe in the beauty of their dreams."  
*Eleanor Roosevelt*

"That which does not kill us makes us stronger."  
*Nietzche*

"We can gain strength and courage and confidence,  
By each experience in which we really stop to look fear in the face....  
We must do that which we think we cannot."  
*Eleanor Roosevelt*

It is very hard to change your own patterns of behaviour and thought.. You should know, however, that **you** are the only one in charge of making yourself feel better, so it is worth it to try.

# Adolescence and Medication

**H**aving seizures under control helps contribute to living a full life. Not taking your medicine as prescribed will not help control your seizures. People who suddenly stop taking their medication may have more severe seizures and/or life-threatening *status epilepticus* (where life-threatening seizures last for 5 or more minutes or occur one after another). You may feel that taking medication everyday is a real hassle and that “other teens don’t, so why should I?” Try to think of your medication as allowing you to do a lot more of the things you want to do. The less often you have seizures, the less interference you will have in your day to day activities.

If your doctor feels that it is the right time for you to go off medication, the process requires patience. Your doctor will probably order blood tests, and will work with you to determine how to discontinue treatment. This will depend on a number of things, such as how long you have been seizure free, the type of seizures you experience, the medication you take, etc. Any concerns about going off medication should be discussed with your doctor. Never stop taking antiepileptic drugs (AEDs) on your own. This could result in a *status epilepticus*.

Remember to take your medication as prescribed each day. This can be difficult sometimes, especially when you have a hectic schedule. Here are a few tips to help you remember.

- ♣ Wear a watch with an alarm and set it for the time you need to take your medication.
- ♣ When travelling to places with a different time zone, wear a watch set to your home time zone, and take medication according to this time.
- ♣ Use a pillbox.
- ♣ Associate your medication time with a daily activity. For example, when you use the bathroom in the morning and/or at night, take your medication. Discuss this method with your doctor.
- ♣ Always carry medication with you in case you are not at home when it is time to take it.
- ♣ Attend your regular scheduled doctor appointments as a motivator to help you continue your medication.
- ♣ To ensure that you have enough medication between scheduled doctor appointments, calculate and keep track of how many pills you have left in each medication bottle. Keep your physician informed of this.

Note: As a young adult you have adult responsibilities: this includes taking care of your health. Make sure you are doing so by taking your medication as prescribed.

There may be side effects when taking antiepileptic drugs. Side effects depend on the type of AED, the dosage, and your own response to the medication. If you are having a major side effect, such as an allergic reaction, to one type of AED, consult your doctor immediately. There are many types of AEDs, so switching to another AED may be a possible option. Remember: all types of medication may have minor side effects such as drowsiness, dizziness, rashes etc., and these are not uncommon. Be sure to ask your doctor if there are any possible side effects you should be aware of.

During puberty, your body starts to undergo many physical changes. You may grow taller, weigh more, and have added hair growth. Since your body is changing at such a fast rate, the dosage you were already using may not be enough. Your doctor may want to order more frequent blood tests, in order to find a better dosage for you.

## Seizure Activity in Young Adults

It is difficult to tell whether seizure activity will be any different once an individual reaches adolescence. Some people with epilepsy may see a decline in frequency of seizures, while others may not. For example, children with absence seizures will usually stop having them by the time they reach adolescence.

Use a diary to record your seizures. Include the type, date, time, duration, what you were doing, possible triggers, etc. This information is important for your doctor to assess whether there have been any changes in your seizures. Your records will also come in handy when you need to recall your medical history later.

# Adolescent Women

**A**dolescent women go through a tough time, especially when epilepsy is added to their list of concerns. There are some extra concerns for young women with epilepsy. When the menstrual cycle for adolescent women starts, seizure activity may change or stay the same. For some women, there are no ties between menstruating and having seizures. In the case of catamenial epilepsy however, there are strong connections. Here, seizures may occur more frequently right before, during, closely after, or between cycles of ovulation. Dealing with epilepsy as well as all the other physical, emotional and social changes — the process of self acceptance — may not always be easy, but this is all part of becoming an adult.

## Pregnancy

Pregnancy is of special concern for women with epilepsy. For more than 90% of babies born to women with epilepsy, inherited epilepsy is not an issue. There is, however, a slightly increased chance of birth defects. A woman in the general population has a 2-3% risk of giving birth to a baby with a birth abnormality; for those with epilepsy, the risk is 4-6%.

Taking antiepileptic drugs can also add to the health risks for babies. Although the effects of AEDs are of concern, you should never just stop taking your medication. Doing so could mean major and frequent seizures that can bring serious danger to both you and your child. These risks may be reduced by taking prenatal vitamins, including folic acid.

Understand all of the risks and possible preventions before becoming pregnant. Your doctor should be knowledgeable of your current status. S/he may need to change your AED dosage in order to match your body's medication metabolism. If you are pregnant, ask your neurologist about finding a medical treatment plan that is right for both you and your child.

Antiepileptic drugs which produce enzymes may lead to a decrease in the effectiveness of oral contraceptives. Consult with your doctor before taking any contraceptive pills.

# Family Dysfunction

**Fact** Seizure disorders affect not only the person with epilepsy, but all of the family members living with that person as well.

Many tensions are created within the family if members do not co-operate in dealing with epilepsy. Often, mothers will want to talk about and gather information about epilepsy, while fathers tend to avoid the issue. Siblings may also have trouble coping as more and more attention is given to the adolescent with epilepsy. These problems, if left unaddressed, can cause conflict within the family. In order to limit these frustrations, the entire family must acknowledge the stress and find a way to deal with epilepsy as a whole.

Financial problems may also develop if the family does not have a health plan and more of the family's income is needed to purchase expensive antiepileptic medication. Strain increases for the entire family as previously purchased items are limited or entirely cut out of the budget.

The unpredictability of seizures may cause parents to become overprotective. This can be a problem if you — in the process of becoming an adult — are prevented from making independent decisions. If you have tried speaking with your parents about your concerns and still feel frustrated, you might want to ask your doctor for help. However, parents might have reason to worry. Be aware of the possible dangers of all your actions.

Whether you realize and admit it or not, your relationship with your family members has a great impact on you. Don't shut them out just because you feel they will not understand. Remember that they are not psychics and can not know your concerns if you don't discuss your concerns with them.

# Epilepsy and Dating

Everyone gets nervous when it comes to dating: the more comfortable you feel about who you are, the more likely you will succeed. It is your own decision whether to tell your partner that you have epilepsy. You should tell your partner when you are ready to do so. Remember though, honesty is always the best policy. When people are properly informed, they are better able to handle situations more appropriately and without fear. Those who care about you will come to understand that you are just like anyone else, only that you happen to have epilepsy. You may come across people who will reject you after you disclose your medical situation. However, honesty is the only way you can learn to develop close relationships.

## Epilepsy and Sexuality

Anyone can experience sexual problems. Studies have shown that individuals with or without epilepsy have the same symptoms if they are experiencing sexual problems. Compared with the general public, those with epilepsy have a slightly higher chance of having sexual anxieties, but these problems are just as treatable. Issues regarding sexual problems are more often recognized now, and new treatments are constantly being developed.

For men with epilepsy, sexual dysfunction is not something rare. Certain types of antiepileptic drugs may play a role. Some antiepileptic drugs, including phenobarbital, primidone (Mysoline®), and carbamazepine (Tegretol®), may cause alterations to androgens including testosterone, thereby contributing to reproductive dysfunction.

People with complex partial seizures have a higher risk of sexual dysfunction especially if seizures start in the temporal lobe. Antiepileptic drugs (AEDs) may also interfere with sexual performance. If you feel that the AED which you are using is causing sexual difficulties, discuss your concerns with your doctor. Switching to another type of AED may help.

Low self-esteem may also contribute to sexual problems. The inability to accept yourself and your epilepsy can lead to a decrease in sexual arousal. Have confidence in yourself and remember that each person is different when it comes to sexuality. Worrying about how your seizures will affect your sexual relationship may decrease your self-esteem, and this can lead to sexual problems.

## Sexual Difficulties for People with Epilepsy

Social opportunities, educational and occupational experiences are often restricted unnecessarily for people with epilepsy.

- ▷ Recurrent seizures may lead to a sense of vulnerability and helplessness (poor self-esteem), impairing the capacity to form healthy, nurturing relationships.
- ▷ Fear that sexual activity will induce a seizure, particularly for persons whose seizures are sometimes triggered by hyperventilation or physical exertion.
- ▷ Fear that disclosure of your condition to your partner might affect the sexual dynamics of your relationship.
- ▷ Social and familial stresses due to your sexual orientation, as well as living with epilepsy, may affect your sexual responses and relationships.
- ▷ Sexual behaviour may be negatively reinforced if sexual feelings are a component of your seizures.
- ▷ Hormones supporting sexual behaviour may change due to seizures and/or antiepileptic drugs.
- ▷ Antiepileptic drugs have direct effects on brain regions mediating sexuality and may also cause sexual dysfunction by secondary effects on reproductive hormones.

Although people with epilepsy have a greater possibility of sexual dysfunction, this does not mean that they can't feel and express sexual emotions. Most patients with epilepsy lead fulfilling sex lives. Any questions or concerns should be discussed with your family doctor or counsellor.

If you are sexually active, make sure that you are informed about AIDS and STD prevention and birth control options, and that you take responsibility for your own actions.

# Alcohol and Other Drugs

**M**any drugs create serious consequences in everyone. For people with epilepsy, substance abuse is an even greater concern. Studies show that crack (methamphetamine) causes seizures. There are also dangers associated with the interaction between many drugs (including alcohol) and antiepileptic medications.

Like alcohol, each person will have different reactions to various drugs. Abusing drugs puts you in physical, mental and emotional danger. Education is the most powerful way to prevent substance abuse. The following list of drugs explains their effects, both related and unrelated to seizures.

## Alcohol

After being absorbed into the bloodstream, alcohol slows activity in the brain and spinal cord. The effects of drinking alcohol include impaired judgement, slowed reflexes, impaired vision, loss of appetite, sleepiness, etc. These effects vary for each person, and are influenced by how much alcohol is consumed within a specific period of time, the individual's body size, the individual's gender, the rate of metabolism, and whether there is any food ingested at the same time as the alcohol.

Mixed with anti-epileptic drugs, alcohol can be dangerous. Exactly how much alcohol it takes to cause a problem though, depends on each individual. Also, excessive alcohol consumption may increase seizure activity. Excessive alcohol may also decrease sleep and nutrition, triggering seizures. Uncontrolled drinking may lead to withdrawal seizures 6 to 72 hours after the last drink. Knowing this information does not mean you should skip taking your medication during alcohol consumption. Instead, be aware of the consequences of alcohol. If you do drink, know your limits. It is okay for many people to drink moderately once in a while. However, if you drink more than what your body can handle, you are heading for trouble.

## Nicotine

- Effects include faster heartbeat and pulse rate, damage to blood vessels, lung and other cancers, indigestion, ulcerations, etc.
- Does not cause seizures, but you should be aware of the risk of starting a fire if a cigarette is dropped during a seizure.

## Caffeine

- This addictive stimulant can bring heightened blood pressure levels, restlessness, as well as headaches.
- If used over a long period of time and then suddenly stopped, it will lead to tiredness, depression, and feelings of irritability, and headache.

## Heroin

- This powder is white in its pure form. When bought from drug dealers it is diluted to a light brown.
- Effects include perspiration, delayed onset of sleep, feelings of anxiousness, etc.
- Over a long period of time, it causes mood swings and decreased sexual arousal.
- Taken in large amounts, it can cause oxygen deprivation leading to seizures.
- Used to temporarily relieve discomfort.

## Cannabis (marijuana)

- Cannabidiol (CBD) has anticonvulsant effects and tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) has been shown to both provoke and suppress seizures.
- Can cause mouth to feel dry, increased heart rate, reddened eyes, impaired judgement.
- Constant use leads to memory loss, difficulties in keeping stimulated, emotional imbalances, etc.

## Ecstasy

- This drug comes in capsule or powder increases energy levels making an individual feel "high".
- Short term effects include heart problems, dehydration, exhaustion, and feelings of dismay.
- Long term use, paranoia, tension, mental disability, and seizures.

## Amphetamines (speed)

- Low dosages can bring high blood pressure, loss of appetite, abnormal breathing pattern that last for hours or days.
- High dosages cause tremors, dizziness, co-ordination deficiencies, etc.
- Taken for feelings of euphoria.

## Cocaine (crack)

- ▷ White powder.
- ▷ Small dose will cause appetite to decrease and there may be heightened restlessness.
- ▷ The individual may become anxious, constantly exhausted, have tremors, experience paranoia, develop blurred vision, etc.
- ▷ Overdose can lead to heart problems, seizures, and death.

## Hallucinogens

- ▷ Mood swings, dilated pupils, tremors, delayed onset of sleep, increased body temperature, etc. are among the effects.
- ▷ Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) causes coordination problems, quickened heartbeat, increased body temperature, and may cause seizures.

# Sports and Health

Being an adult means that you have to start taking care of your own health. Regular exercise is important: it brings better sleep, decreases stress, and therefore, improves seizure control. Participating in sports is good for both your physical and mental health.

When choosing a physical activity, consider your interests as well as your medical condition. For example, avoid sports in which the loss of consciousness could potentially lead to a life or death situation. These sports include all diving (including sky and scuba), mountain climbing, etc. Sports such as swimming, football, hockey, canoeing, etc. should not be an issue for most people as long as there is appropriate supervision and protective gear is worn where applicable.

Talk to your doctor before you start any new sport. Make sure that your coaches are aware of your medical situation and know what to do if you have a seizure.

Just because you have epilepsy doesn't mean that you can't have fun. The key is to use common sense and be careful.

# Epilepsy and Depression

Depression in adolescents has become an increasingly important issue. Studies show that depression is more common in teens with epilepsy than in those with other chronic disorders or those without health problems.

Approximately 20% of people with epilepsy experience depression. Suicide rates among people with epilepsy are 5 times higher than in the general population. Become aware of depression and its warning signs, and be ready to deal with it.

How you feel about your seizures is directly related to depression. Those who do not adjust to their seizures tend to have a greater chance of depression. Your attitude towards your family relationships is another factor associated with depression. Communication is key to any relationship and, although it may be hard at times, try your best to be open to family members about your concerns.

Some studies show that seizures originating in the temporal lobe (the part of the brain that controls emotional behaviour) may influence motivation levels. Often, people don't realize that they are experiencing depression, and therefore take no action to find help. For those who recognize depression, **treatment is available!** Consult your doctor for more information. You can also get help over the phone: check your local phone directory for the Distress Centre nearest you.

Epilepsy is not always diagnosed. When people do not know what is happening to them, they cannot receive proper treatment. As this continues, more and more anxiety is built up. It is important to learn about epilepsy so that everyone will know how to recognize the signs of seizure disorders.

# Stress

**S**tress is unavoidable in day to day life and is generally harmless. However, being very stressed all the time is not good for you. Stress may cause hyperventilation (where your breathing rate increases drastically) which can lead to having a seizure. Stress can also cause you to forget to take your medication. If you are working and in school, you probably will find it hard at times to balance these with your social life. Keep in mind that your health should be your most important priority, and that you should plan your schedule to be most comfortable for you, both socially and emotionally.

What happens when individuals are unable to balance the different components of their lives? We all experience stress throughout our lives, but most of us do not know how stress is caused scientifically. The following illustration shows the physical changes that occur.

## **Situation:**

You have a test tomorrow, but you haven't studied for it. You have been working after school everyday and on the weekends for the past two weeks. Today is your only day off from work, and you want to go out to a club with your friends.

## **Physical changes in your body:**

- ∅ As you think more and more about the situation, you react to it and adrenaline is released in your body. Your heart and breathe rates accelerate.
- ∅ As this continues, sugars and fats which are stored in your body are released. Your body starts feeling tired and strained.
- ∅ Throughout this, energy is being burned and your body will try to replace it. If this continues, so much energy is used up in such a short time that your body cannot regenerate it fast enough.

The key to limiting stress depends on your thoughts about difficult situations. What you need to do is recognize that you must make changes in your life. You may complain that you have no time to handle work, school and still go out with friends, but complaining is no use if you don't do anything about it. Here are a few suggestions.

- ∅ Pick out the things that cause the most anxiety.
  - You don't have enough time to study for tests because of your part-time job.
- ∅ Change the way you deal with these stressors.
  - Since you are usually aware of upcoming tests ahead of time, let your managers know that you will be unable to work, or at least not as much, during those days before your test.
- ∅ Don't leave things to the last minute.
  - Don't wait until the day before your test to start looking over your notes. Understand that there are things in life that are beyond your control, and come to terms with them.
  - You need to understand that there will be days when things just don't go as planned. Don't take these days too seriously; remember that tomorrow is a whole new day.
- ∅ Talk to friends/ family members about your stressors, even when they may not be able to help you.
  - If your day at work was stressful, talk to your parents and friends about it.
- ∅ Exercise and participate in sports.
  - Go to a gym for a few hours each week. Play basketball or anything else that interests you with friends. Remember: the goal is to increase your mental and physical well-being and decrease your stress.
- ∅ Take time for yourself.
  - Read a book. Paint. Catch up on your favourite television shows, etc.

# Support Groups

In order to cope with epilepsy or any chronic disorder, you must learn to accept it. Sometimes it may be difficult for adolescents to openly talk to people about their epilepsy. Support groups can help you to create a positive attitude towards your medical situation, as well as teach you how to take control of your life.

Group members can help each other in providing advice and encouragement on issues of concern to adolescents, including epilepsy. Facilitators will also help to clear up any inaccurate information. As a developing adolescent, you learn how to interact with others and sharpen communication skills. Support groups provide an understanding environment where members can develop social skills which can be applied to everyday situations. Support networks help individuals gain confidence in themselves, and therefore can increase their quality of life.

Most importantly, adolescents who join support groups can also learn how to deal with other people's misconceptions. It is the falsehoods about epilepsy that bring stigma. Adolescents with epilepsy need to get the honest facts about epilepsy for themselves and then use them to stand up against prejudice.

Contact your local epilepsy chapter if you are interested in joining a self help or support group.

# Employment

For most, adolescence is a time to find and start your first job. Having seizures does not mean that you shouldn't look for employment. Studies show that people with epilepsy are often more productive on the job, and are absent less often than their peers. Talk to your school guidance counsellor about setting career goals that incorporate your interests, as well as your medical situation. There are training and employment programs which can help you also. Contact your local chapter or Epilepsy Ontario for more information.

It may be difficult to decide to tell your employers about your epilepsy. It will probably make you feel better, knowing that you are not keeping anything from them. Consider how often you have seizures and whether your employer will likely find out even if you don't disclose. If you decide to disclose your epilepsy, be confident! Most employers will not know a lot about epilepsy, and may be fearful. To ensure your employers that your medical condition will not affect your ability to work, you should tell them how many minutes your seizures last, how often they occur, if you need any first aid, and how long before you are fully recovered. Be prepared to offer more information or to tell them where they can get it. Come across as knowledgeable and positive. If you are unsure of yourself, your employer may be unsure about you as well.

When filling out application forms for a job, you may want to leave medical questions blank to prevent you from being labelled. After being accepted, you may want to inform your employer of your medical situation, as discussed above. Be aware that under the Ontario Human Rights Code, it is illegal for employers to discriminate against you because you have a disability. For more information contact:

Ontario Human Rights Commission  
180 Dundas Street West, 8th Floor  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2R9  
800-387-9080 (toll free)  
"<http://www.ohrc.on.ca>"

# Driving

**A**dolescence is a time during which many teens start to drive. Driving is a privilege, not a right. People with uncontrolled epilepsy are not permitted to drive. If a seizure were to take place while operating a vehicle, you would put yourself and all other drivers and pedestrians around you in danger.

Provincial laws require all doctors to report seizures to the Ministry of Transportation. It is not your physician who decides whether you are able to drive: laws govern who may drive. In the Province of Ontario, your licence will be suspended if you have a seizure. When you have had no seizures for 1 year and if your medication does not cause drowsiness or poor coordination, your doctor can write a report to the Ministry of Transportation, and you may become eligible to drive. Like everyone else, you must pass the appropriate driving exams in order to receive your driver's licence.

If you already have your G1 or G2 driver's licence and your licence is suspended for medical reasons, you still have only until your licence expiry date to pass the final G-class examination. No extensions are issued to novice (G1 or G2) licence drivers. If you have not obtained your full G licence by the expiry date, you may take your G1 again after the reinstatement of your licence.

Not being able to drive is not the end of the world! Travelling by public transportation or getting a ride from family or friends is okay too. It doesn't mean you

won't be able to do the same things you did before. You can even take advantage of the time that public transportation affords to read a newspaper or magazine, do school work, etc.

In the United States of America, people with controlled epilepsy (as well as other medical conditions) are not permitted to drive commercial vehicles. This means that even if you are legally permitted to drive a commercial vehicle in Canada and are planning a trip to the USA, you will not be permitted to drive beyond the Canadian borderline.

If you have any further questions, call the Medical Review Sector of Ministry of Transportation at 800-268-1481 or your local Driver Examination Centre.

If you have changed to a new AED or had a major change to your dosage of medication, be cautious of driving. The new medication or dosage may cause drowsiness. It is wise to not drive until you know that your medication is not the source of any problems. There are also specific AEDs that can cause side effects which may negatively affect your driving.

## ***Medication***

acetazolamide (Diamox®)

clobazam (Frisium®)

lamotrigine (Lamictal®)

nitrazepam (Mogadon®)

carbamazepine (Tegretol®)

## ***Side Effect***

drowsiness, confusion

drowsiness, confusion

dizziness, problems with muscle coordination,  
double or blurred vision, somnolence

drowsiness, mental confusion, lightheadedness

dizziness, drowsiness, blurred or double vision

**If you are experiencing these side effects, do not drive or operate dangerous machines.**

**Do not drive unless your doctor and the government have sanctioned it.**

# Students Living Away from Home

Congratulations to those of you who will be attending college or university! You are on your way to a new and important chapter of your life. If it is your first year, you may feel a little intimidated. If you are a little nervous, chances are that others are feeling the same way. For those living in residence, here are a few things to keep in mind.

- ♫ Inform your dorm supervisor of your seizure disorder, and make sure s/he knows the appropriate first aid treatment you require.
- ♫ It is your decision whether or not to disclose your epilepsy to your roommate. However, it may be a good idea as your roommate will likely find anyway. People tend to be less fearful if they know ahead of time what may happen so that they are prepared to handle the situation.
- ♫ Often when students live away from home, they lose out on nutritious home cooked meals. When buying foods, try to maintain a healthy diet.
- ♫ Now that you are out on your own and have no parents watching over you, you will probably not sleep as much as you used to. Since adequate sleep contributes to better seizure control, ensure that you get enough sleep each night.

The experiences gained from post-secondary education will last a lifetime; whether these memories are positive or negative depends on you. Try joining associations that are of interest to you, since getting involved with your school will make you feel more a part of it. There are student counsel organizations, associations for different cultures, athletic teams, etc. Discover your options. The school's many organizations can usually be found easily on their web sites, in school newspapers, in school agendas, and on flyers posted around campus.

## Miscellaneous

### **Q: Do people with epilepsy have to follow a specific diet?**

A: Eat nutritious foods, whether or not you have with epilepsy. Unless you are on the ketogenic diet, there are no specific foods you must eat. Having a balanced diet, however, does contribute to better seizure control.

### **Q: Why is it important to learn about the social aspects of epilepsy?**

A: Often, people with epilepsy experience more problems as a result of stigmatization rather than from the actual medical condition itself. It is important to learn about these social consequences so that people with epilepsy are aware of them and will know how to deal with these situations if confronted by them.

# Epilepsy Ontario Events for Teens

## Senior Spike & Wave Camp

Epilepsy Ontario hosts annual summer camping adventures for children and young adults with epilepsy aged 16 to 24. The Senior Spike & Wave camp provides an exciting environment at Camp Couchiching, where teens are able to meet new friends, participate in various camping activities, and just enjoy themselves. Campers take part in scavenger hunts, canoeing, kayaking, swimming, etc. Epilepsy Ontario recognizes the need for teens with epilepsy to

participate in memorable, enjoyable outdoor events with peers. Epilepsy should not get in the way of these fun activities.

If you are interested in attending our Spike & Wave program for teens, please contact Epilepsy Ontario or your local chapter. Application forms are sent out to all potential campers every April. Sponsorship is available.

## Winterfest

Every February, youths with epilepsy to meet together for this fun-filled outing. Youths with epilepsy aged 13 to 19 who can participate actively in outdoor activities may apply. Sponsorship is available for members of local chapters of Epilepsy Ontario.

In previous Winterfests, youths have participated in group activity games, cross-country skiing, snow-

shoeing, mountain climbing, forest survival, and more. Youths find Winterfest rewarding in its promotion of socialization among peers. Participants gain self-esteem, learn teamwork and communication skills, and enhance problem solving capabilities. Unforgettable moments and friendships are built during this experience.

## Outstanding Youth Contest

Epilepsy Ontario's "Outstanding Youth" contest celebrates extraordinary youths living with epilepsy. This program enables 16 to 21 year-old adolescents with epilepsy to voice their opinion about how they successfully cope with the disorder.

Each epilepsy chapter in Ontario nominates 2 youths who successfully cope with their epilepsy, have a positive attitude, are involved in the community, and want to disclose their achievements. An essay of 100

words or less describing how the nominee copes with epilepsy is submitted by the youths themselves or by their chapter. T-shirts are given to each participant. Cash prizes are given to the first-, second- and third-place winners. Photos of prize winners and their essays will be published in Epilepsy Ontario's quarterly magazine, Sharing. If you are interested in entering this contest, please contact your local chapter for information about deadlines, prizes and rules.

# Volunteering

Volunteering is an extremely beneficial experience, especially for young adults. Often, employers will not hire applicants who do not have any job experience. Through volunteering positions, you can learn valuable employment skills. Various responsibilities are delegated to volunteers, challenging their problem solving techniques, communication skills, and critical thinking.

In addition to gaining employment skills, volunteers will find that the experience can be very fulfilling and can provide a sense of accomplishment. By volunteering, you are helping others in your community. It makes you feel good to know that others are able to benefit from your contribution. Volunteering also boosts your energy level. People often feel more “pumped up” to accomplish tasks when they know that others count on their help and appreciate their work.

## Volunteering

- ∂ raises your self-esteem. Once you start feeling positive towards your work, you will also find that your self-esteem level rises.
- ∂ allows you to explore your career path or new career options.
- ∂ broadens your perspective. When you volunteer, you experience first hand how things work in “real life”, giving you a better understanding of the world around you.
- ∂ is an excellent opportunity to meet new people. You will meet people from different parts of your community with distinct experiences; you can learn from each other.
- ∂ teaches you more about yourself: what you enjoy doing, your strengths and talents, how well you work in a workplace, brings out more of your personality, etc.

## Now that you want to volunteer:

- ∂ Contact your local volunteer centre. Call 800-670-0401 or visit Canada’s volunteer web site at “<http://www.volunteer.ca>”.
- ∂ Ask your school counsellor about placement positions that are available.
- ∂ Check your local phone directory for organizations that may need volunteers.
- ∂ Search the Internet for volunteer opportunities.
- ∂ Check for listings in radio and television news, and newspapers.



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