

how epilepsy can affect learning

This information is taken from Epilepsy Society's website:
epilepsysociety.org.uk/university-and-epilepsy

There are lots of things you could think about doing to reduce any impact epilepsy may have on your learning and university life. You might have lots of ideas of your own about what is going to be best for you or it may be worth contacting your university's disability advisor to see what help they can offer. Finding out what is available as far in advance as possible means that the support and help will be there if you need it. Here are some things to think about that might help to lessen any impact.

Know your epilepsy

General information about epilepsy can be very helpful but how does it apply to you? Learning more about your epilepsy might help you to identify triggers and patterns to your seizures so that you can try and avoid situations that are likely to 'set off' a seizure. It might also help you to develop coping strategies or ways to manage your epilepsy and seizures to reduce their impact on learning. You might find that keeping a seizure diary helps you to keep track. You can order printed seizure diaries from us or, download our free app with a built-in seizure diary.

 **Call our helpline (see back page for details), or visit epilepsysociety.org.uk/digitalmedia**

Consider how you learn and work best

Are you better with private study, group work, lectures or practical work? Perhaps an academic course might be right for you, or, if you are better at practical work, then a vocational course may suit you better. Do you prefer course work or exams? Have a look through the course prospectus, or get in touch with the university, to find out more about how courses are run and assessed. If you think doing the course over a longer period of time would help, you could contact the university to discuss whether this would be an option.

How you feel

Epilepsy, seizures, and medication, may affect how you feel both physically and emotionally. Seizures may cause injury or make you feel tired and 'out of sorts'. You may be quite relaxed about your epilepsy, or it may make you stressed or depressed. All these feelings may affect your well-being, concentration or memory.

Being able to manage your seizures so that you have the fewest seizures possible and so that they have the minimal impact might help improve how you feel. Generally looking after yourself, for example getting enough sleep and eating well, can also help. Some people find it helpful to talk to friends or to a university counsellor.

 **Call our helpline (see back page for details) for information and emotional support**

The cause of your epilepsy

There are lots of reasons why someone might have epilepsy and you may or may not know the cause. If your epilepsy is the result of an illness or brain injury, this in itself could affect you. For example, a cause that affects the temporal lobe of your brain may affect your memory, or maybe the cause might affect your concentration. Understanding the cause of your epilepsy may help you choose the right type of course for you.

The impact of your seizures

The impact of your seizures depends on how they affect you, how often they happen and how long they last. If your seizures are controlled by medication, they may have no impact on you at all.

Some seizures may not affect you physically. Other seizures may cause you to behave in a strange way or you may fall down, and this may cause injuries that you may need time to recover from. Tonic Clonic seizures (where you fall and shake) may affect you for some time afterwards. Letting your friends, lecturers and tutors know about your epilepsy may help them to understand and support you better.

Tiredness

If you have seizures, sometimes they may take some time to recover from. Some people may be able to go about their normal activities quickly after a seizure, but others may feel tired and need to sleep and take time to rest afterwards.

Having seizures at night can affect the amount and quality of your sleep. This lack of sleep can also have an impact on you and your learning. Explaining this to tutors can help them to understand and support you.

For some people, tiredness can also be a trigger for seizures. Having fun when you go out is important but getting enough sleep and being aware of your triggers can help reduce seizures and their impact.

Treatment

Most people with epilepsy have their seizures controlled with the right medication. But whether your seizures are controlled or not, taking medication or other forms of treatment can also affect you. Not everyone experiences side effects from medication but, for some people, side effects can make them tired or drowsy or can make it harder to think and process information, or to learn or remember things. It may help to work out the best time of day to take medication or to speak to your neurologist about the most appropriate medication for you as a student.

For some people with epilepsy, having epilepsy surgery can help to reduce or completely stop their seizures. While surgery may help to reduce the impact of having seizures, surgery itself can potentially cause problems, particularly with memory. When someone is being considered for epilepsy surgery the possible impact of surgery, and how their memory may be affected, will be carefully considered to see if surgery is suitable. If surgery is an option for you, you may want to talk through your plans for university with your neurosurgeon and discuss any impact on your learning.

Memory

For some people, epilepsy and seizures can affect their memory and ability to take on, store and use information. This can happen during and after a seizure. It may be an ongoing issue or it may only happen following seizures.

If your epilepsy or seizures affect your memory, memory aids and techniques may help. Also, mobile phones can be a useful reminder. You may be able to have someone to take lecture notes for you or you could use a laptop to take notes. You may be able to get a disabled student's allowance to help with the cost.

 Visit epilepsysociety.org.uk/memory
Visit gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas

Concentration

Seizures can affect your concentration both during and following a seizure. It may be hard to concentrate on what is being said, or on taking notes. If you know that your epilepsy affects your ability to concentrate, having someone to take notes for you might help. You might also find that certain times of the day are better for studying. For example, if you have seizures during the night or early morning, studying later in the day, once you have recovered, might be better.

Disrupted classes or lectures

If you have a seizure during a class or lecture, it may be disruptive for you. Depending on how your seizures affect you, it may be only a minor disruption, or you may need to go somewhere quiet to recover, which will take you out of the class.

You could plan ahead for what you want to happen if you have a seizure during classes or lectures. It might help to talk to your lecturers about what your seizures are like, how they affect you and what you want to happen if you have one. This might help to make sure that you are not taken out of a class or lecture unnecessarily, or that you have a place to recover if you need to. It can help to make sure you are treated how you want to be treated during a seizure.

If your seizures mean that you miss lectures, lecturers may be able to email you notes or slides that you have missed, or they may be on the university intranet, or friends may be happy to share their notes.

Exams

For many people, revising for and taking exams can be worrying and stressful. This could cause more seizures if stress is a trigger for you. Planning your revision in advance might make you feel more confident about getting it all done, and help you feel less stressed. Revising somewhere quiet and at the best time of day for you might also help with concentration and memory.

If having epilepsy affects your memory and thinking speed, you may find that some sort of 'special provision' can help, for example, being able to take your exams in a separate room or having more time to complete the exam. You might be able to have someone to write for you. This will need planning and you would need to talk to your lecturers and tutors about it.

Practical work and course work

If your course includes practical or course work, you may find that your epilepsy could affect this. For example, if you are doing practical work in a laboratory and you have a seizure, could this be a safety risk for you? Or if you are doing a course with physical activities, how might having a seizure affect you?

Thinking about the type of course you are doing, and the risks from having seizures, may help you to plan ahead. It is important to be realistic about potential risks. For example, if you have a warning before a seizure, this might give you enough time to get to a safe place before the seizure starts and so your seizures may not pose any risk. Many situations can be made safer with simple measures, and it might help to think of some ideas yourself or talk them through with your lecturers or tutors.

Course placements

Some university degrees include placements as part of the course. Even if your university lecturers and tutors know about your epilepsy, the staff at your placement may not.

Thinking about what the placement will be, and getting in touch with them as soon as possible, might help them to understand your epilepsy. It is important to be realistic about whether your epilepsy might affect the placement and to think of ways of making it safer, if necessary. It may be worth talking to your tutors, and asking for their help to liaise with the placement.

Living life to the full

Trying to find ways to make epilepsy just part of your life might help you to make the most of going to university. The key to achieving a fuller life might be by taking care of yourself, taking control of your epilepsy, planning ahead and making the most of what help and support is available.

There are a number of websites and forums that offer information and support.

[ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/individual-needs/disabled-students](https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/individual-needs/disabled-students)

[nus.org.uk](https://www.nus.org.uk)

[studentastic.co.uk](https://www.studentastic.co.uk)

[thestudentroom.co.uk](https://www.thestudentroom.co.uk)

[studential.com](https://www.studential.com)

If you would like to talk to someone about anything you have read here, you can call our epilepsy helpline on the number below.

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[epilepsysociety.org.uk](https://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk)



helpline

01494 601 400

Monday and Tuesday 9am to 4pm

Wednesday 9am to 7.30pm

Confidential (national call rate)