



# Safety

Keeping safe at home.

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For further information visit  
[epilepsysociety.org.uk/safety-and-risk](https://epilepsysociety.org.uk/safety-and-risk)

**For a printed copy, or for a large  
print version, call our helpline on  
01494 601 400.**

## Keeping safe at home

Keeping safe is important for everyone, whether or not they have epilepsy.

If your seizures are controlled by treatment, your safety may not be affected. But if you continue to have seizures, safety may be an issue.

Some safety issues may not be relevant to you, or you may have your own ideas about what would make situations safer for you.

Everyone is different and other people may have different experiences to you. Things that affect them may not be an issue for you.

**For more information about seizures visit [epilepsysociety.org.uk/epileptic-seizures](https://epilepsysociety.org.uk/epileptic-seizures)**

Doing a risk assessment can be one way to identify possible risks for an activity and practical ideas to help make an activity safer. You can also ask your local social services for a health and social care assessment (needs assessment) which looks at your safety at home (see page 14). Your GP or specialist may be able to provide information about how your epilepsy could affect your safety at home.

**Visit [gov.uk/apply-needs-assessment-social-services](https://gov.uk/apply-needs-assessment-social-services) or contact your local council.**

**Visit [epilepsysociety.org.uk/safety-and-risk](https://epilepsysociety.org.uk/safety-and-risk) and [epilepsysociety.org.uk/risk-assessment](https://epilepsysociety.org.uk/risk-assessment)**

Call our helpline for more information or to talk through any queries you have about safety. See back cover for contact details.

## **Around the house**

### **Alarms, monitors, and seizure alerting systems**

Some people with epilepsy choose to have an alarm, or monitor, to get help when they have a seizure. This can be helpful if you have seizures at night or if you live alone.

There are different types of alarm for different types of seizure. Some have a button to press if you know that a seizure is going to happen. Others are triggered if you fall with no warning, or shake or jerk during a seizure. Having a key safe installed outside your front door means others can get in to help you.

Alarm systems may be available through social services or housing associations as part of a 'needs assessment', and some alarms can be linked to a community alarm service.

**Visit [livingmadeeasy.org.uk](http://livingmadeeasy.org.uk)**

### **Fire safety**

If you have a seizure while cooking or smoking, there is a risk of fire. The UK Fire Service recommends that everyone has a smoke alarm on each level of their home, and that the batteries are checked regularly.

Fire-resistant fabrics and furniture are recommended for everyone but will still catch fire if the heat is intense enough.

Your local fire and rescue service can provide a free fire safety check for your home.

**Visit [fireservice.co.uk](http://fireservice.co.uk)**

## Floors and furnishings

Some types of hard flooring, such as ceramic tiles, could injure you if you fall on them.

- Anti-slip flooring, linoleum (lino), cushioned flooring, or carpets may reduce the risk of an injury if you fall. Cushioning underneath carpets, such as padded underlay, may reduce the risk of injuries further.
- Keeping floor space clear of clutter may help.
- Avoiding coarse fabrics may help to reduce the risk of friction burns if you have convulsive seizures.
- Using protective corners on sharp edges of furniture, or having furniture with rounded edges, may reduce injury if you fall against it.

**For flooring guidance and more information visit [livingmadeeasy.org.uk](https://livingmadeeasy.org.uk)**

## Glass

- Try to avoid glass furniture, such as tables, if possible, as it can cause injury if you fall on it and it breaks.
- New homes built since 1994 in the UK use safety glass for windows to reduce the risk of injuries. Safety glass is designed to be difficult to break or to hold together if it is broken.
- Replacing glass in older buildings with safety glass might be helpful. Alternatively, plastic safety glass film prevents glass shattering if it gets broken. It can be fitted onto glass doors and windows, and may be available from some glazing companies and online suppliers.

## **Heating your home**

- Radiator covers may reduce injury and burns if you fall against them during a seizure.
- Using heaters that are secured to the wall or floor means you can't knock them over.
- Open fires and gas fires are best avoided.
- Covering hot pipes with lagging can prevent injury if you grip them or fall against them.

## **Stairs**

- Depending on how your seizures affect you, you may want to consider living on one level.
- Going up the stairs on your hands and feet, and coming down the stairs on your bottom, may reduce risks of injury if a seizure happens.
- Some people may have the option of a toilet, bathroom, or bedroom downstairs, to reduce the need for using the stairs.

## **Medication**

- It is best to keep medication locked away or out of reach. You can find tips on remembering to take your medication.

[Visit \*\*epilepsysociety.org.uk/medication\*\*](https://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk/medication) and [epilepsysociety.org.uk/memory](https://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk/memory)

- You may wish to use the 'message in a bottle' scheme, where you can keep all your personal and medical details, including details of your medication, on a form that you keep in a special bottle in your fridge. Bottles are usually available from GP surgeries or pharmacies or you can call the Lions Club about them.

You can contact the Lions Club for more information on 0121 441 4544.

## **In the kitchen**

### **Ideas for making cooking safer**

#### **Using a microwave**

- Microwave ovens are safer than conventional ovens as they turn off automatically after the cooking time has ended. This means there is less chance of food burning or a fire starting if you leave it unattended. The outside of a microwave may stay cool, so it is less likely than an oven to cause burns if touched.
- Drinks can also be heated in a microwave. Stirring the drink will prevent any uneven 'hot spots' which could burn your mouth.
- Turning saucepan handles to the side can help prevent pans being knocked off the cooker.
- Using rings or burners at the back of the hob can be safer than using those at the front.
- Induction hobs only heat up when a pan is placed onto the hob ring or plate, making them safer than gas hobs. Some cookers have an automatic switch-off feature if the hob is accidentally left on or covered by an object such as clothing.
- A cooker guard around the front of the hob means that rings or burners are harder to touch by accident, which may reduce risks of burns if you lose some awareness during your seizures.

However, if you fall as part of your seizures, a cooker guard could cause injury if you fall onto it, depending on the design.

- Using a low-level grill instead of an eye-level grill can help to reduce the risk of injuring your face if you have a seizure.
- Having a heat resistant work surface means that you may be able to slide heavy pans across the work surface rather than lifting them.
- Using a cooking basket inside a saucepan means that you can lift the basket out after cooking and the hot water drains back into the pan.
- Using a trolley to transfer food from the cooker to the table means that you don't have to carry hot or heavy dishes.

### **Making hot drinks**

- Cordless kettles that switch off automatically and have a lid that 'locks' shut can help prevent scalds. A kettle tipper (cradle) helps you to pour hot water without lifting the kettle.
- Thermal mugs with lids can help to protect you if you spill a hot drink during a seizure.

### **Ironing**

- Using a tumble dryer may reduce the need for ironing. Cordless irons that switch off automatically after a set time, and have no cable to trip over, can reduce the risk of burns if you have a seizure while ironing.



## In the bathroom

### Ideas for making the bathroom safer

- Doors that open outwards can make it easier for other people to get to you if you have a seizure and need help. An alternative is a concertina door, or one that slides sideways.
- Locks that can be opened from the outside, or an “Engaged” sign on the door instead of a lock, allow privacy but means that someone can open the door if you need help.
- Using plastic containers for toiletries, rather than glass, can reduce the chances of injury if you knock them over.
- Floor tiles made of rubber or anti-slip flooring may be safer than polished floors.

### Showers

Having a shower can be safer than having a bath because the water drains away. This will significantly reduce the risk of drowning if you have a seizure.

If you are choosing a new shower or changing your existing one, the following tips may help.

- Level access (walk-in) showers or wet rooms give easy access and have fewer hard surfaces to fall against, such as the side of a bath. Avoid showers with high-sided bases as the water level can rise if the drain is covered.

- A shower curtain, rather than a screen or door, might make it easier for someone to get to you quickly if you have a seizure. If there is a cubicle door, it is safer if it opens outwards.
- A shower seat may help reduce the risk of injury if you fall during a seizure.
- Soap trays set into the wall (instead of sticking out) and anti-slip shower mats can also help.

## **Baths**

Having a bath carries higher risks than having a shower. If you have no shower, then the following may help to reduce risks.

- If possible, having a bath when there is someone else around means that they can help you if you have a seizure.
- Using a listening monitor (such as a baby monitor) might make it easier for someone outside the room to hear that you are OK, while still giving you some privacy.
- Running a shallow bath and putting cold water in first can help prevent scalds if you have a seizure and fall into the water.
- Fitting thermostatically controlled taps means that the water will not get too hot. A qualified plumber can fit these for you.

**Products may be available locally or online. For more information and product reviews visit [livingmadeeasy.org.uk](http://livingmadeeasy.org.uk) or [ridc.org.uk](http://ridc.org.uk)**

## **In the bedroom**

- If there is a risk of you falling out of bed during a seizure, then having a low-level bed, or mattress on the floor, means there is less distance to fall and may reduce injuries.
- Sleeping in the middle of a large bed also reduces the risk of falling out of bed during a seizure.
- Padded bed sides are available to help prevent injuries during a seizure or stop you falling out of bed. However, these should be considered with care as it is possible for your arms or legs to become trapped or injured, depending on the design of the bed sides and how your seizures affect you. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) advises that a risk assessment should be carried out before fitting bed sides, to make sure that they are right for your needs, and that they fit your mattress and bed safely.
- Some people who have seizures during the night may have a bed alarm that detects when they have a seizure (see page 4).

## **Safety when sleeping**

- Safety pillows have small holes in so that if you are sleeping face down you may be able to breathe more easily. However, there is no evidence that they are safer than ordinary pillows.

**Visit [epilepsysociety.org.uk/safety-and-risk](https://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk/safety-and-risk)**

## **Gardening and DIY**

If you have seizures, it may be helpful to think about the type and frequency of your seizures and the potential risks of each job, and whether someone else could do it instead.

Knowing your own abilities may help reduce the risks of accidents or injuries. If you are not sure about doing a job yourself, you may want to talk to a professional such as an electrician, plumber, or gardener.

### **DIY**

For anyone doing DIY it is important to take proper safety measures. If you have seizures, there may be other safety issues to consider. For example, if you need to do a job at a height using a ladder, it is important to think about the risk of falling if you have a seizure.

Power tools that have a safety cut-out and use batteries rather than mains power may be safer, as there is no power cord to damage if you have a seizure while using them. Using a circuit breaker can help protect against the risk of electrocution.

### **Gardening**

- Grass or bark chippings are a softer alternative to concrete or gravel and may reduce the risk of a severe injury if you fall.
- Using artificial grass means there is no need to use a lawn mower.

- Using a petrol lawn mower means there is no chance of cutting through the cable if you have a seizure.
- Some mowers will stop automatically when the handle is released. If you do use an electric mower, a circuit breaker at the plug helps protect against electrocution. A cordless or battery mower is safer.

If you have a pond, here are some safety tips that may be helpful.

- Having a pond near the house can make it easier for someone to see and help you if you have a seizure and fall in.
- Having a fence around it can provide a safety barrier.
- It may be possible to fit a safety grid that sits just below the surface of the water. This can hold your weight if you fall on it without spoiling the look of the pond.

## **Seizure alert dogs**

Support Dogs UK train dogs to support owners with specific needs. Seizure alert dogs are specially trained to warn their owner before a seizure starts, so they can get help or move to somewhere safe.

Training with a seizure alert dog can be intensive and you need to be having a certain number of seizures to apply. Support Dogs are not able to train your own pet dog.

**Visit [supportdogs.org.uk](https://supportdogs.org.uk) or call  
0114 261 7800**

## **Needs assessment**

Your local council's social services may be able to help by assessing your needs; this includes a risk assessment. Home assessments are often carried out by an Occupational Therapist (OT), who will visit you at home to see what help, support, or adaptations you might need because of your epilepsy. The assessment aims to identify practical ways to reduce risks and make situations safer, to meet your individual needs. Your GP can refer you.

**[Visit epilepsysociety.org.uk/  
what-help-available](https://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk/what-help-available)**

Our confidential helpline provides emotional support and information for anyone wanting to know more about epilepsy.

**Call our helpline (see back cover)**

## **Outside your home**

Some people with epilepsy may worry about having a seizure when out and about.

Some may choose to wear or carry something with them that says they have epilepsy. Epilepsy Society produces a free 'I have epilepsy' card. You can write details about the type of seizures you have, your medication, and how you would like to be helped if you have a seizure. You can choose to write down details of who to call if there is an emergency.

Other companies provide medical jewellery with your details on, or a phone number where further information can be given.

These can be helpful if you are taken to hospital as doctors will be able to get information about your epilepsy and medication.

### **Further information**

#### **Disabled Living Foundation**

[livingmadeeasy.org.uk](http://livingmadeeasy.org.uk)

Helpline 0300 999 0004

UK charity providing information and advice on alarms, safety and living aids and suppliers.

#### **RiDC (Research Institute for Disabled consumers)**

[ridc.org.uk](http://ridc.org.uk)

Tel: 0207 427 2460

UK charity providing user-centred research on safety aids and equipment.

Every effort is made to ensure that all information is correct at the time of printing. Please note that information is intended for a UK audience. This information is not a substitute for advice from your own doctors. Epilepsy Society is not responsible for any actions taken as a result of using this information.

# epilepsy society

## Helpline

**01494 601 400**

**helpline@epilepsysociety.org.uk**

Confidential, national call rate.

Information and emotional support.

## **Epilepsy Society**

Chesham Lane,  
Chalfont St Peter,  
Buckinghamshire  
SL9 0RJ

**epilepsysociety.org.uk**



**/epilepsysociety**

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