

Is university an option?

For most young people considering university, there are lots of things to think about: do I want to study for another three years (or more!)? What do I want to study? Where do I want to go? Which universities offer my chosen course? What funding and support is available? Should I live at home (if the university is nearby) or move into student accommodation or a shared house? For some people, attending a local university may help to keep the support structure of home and family, and may be an option to consider.

Perhaps the first thing to consider is whether you want to continue your education. This will probably depend on your experiences at school. For some young people with epilepsy, learning may be more difficult. Both epilepsy and treatment for epilepsy can affect concentration and memory. You may have had to take time off school and it might have affected your exam results. Or maybe your epilepsy had little or no impact on how you did at school. Having epilepsy doesn't mean that you can't go to university if you want to.

Be realistic

When thinking about going to university, it helps to be realistic. And again, this depends on you and on your epilepsy.

If you are having lots of seizures or taking medication, which may affect your concentration and learning, then an academic course with lots of course work and exams may be a challenge. But if your seizures are well controlled, then having epilepsy may not impact on your learning at all. And don't forget, if your epilepsy is not controlled at the moment, or you have been diagnosed recently, things may change. Your seizures might become better controlled and your epilepsy may start to have less impact on you.

It helps to focus on what you can do rather than what you can't do, but it is also important to be realistic and honest with yourself. Here are some things you may wish to think about.

- What subjects do you like and what are you good at?
- What do you want to do after university?
- What job would suit you and fit with your lifestyle?
- How do you learn and work best? Are you better at academic or practical subjects or at course work or exams? Consider how your course will be assessed. This can vary a lot between different courses and you may want to think about choosing courses, as much as possible, which will be best for you in terms of stress.
- Which universities offer the courses you are interested in? Where are they based?
- How are the courses run – are they mainly lectures or private study? Do they include practical work or placements?
- What is your epilepsy like? What seizures do you have and how often? What happens to you during your seizures? How do you feel afterwards?
- Have you found that your seizures or medication affect your learning and studying?
- How do you think your epilepsy would impact on the courses you are interested in?
- Consider campus size, commuting distance between accommodation and university buildings, and the impact this may have on you, and how it might affect your epilepsy. For example, if your seizures are triggered by tiredness.
- What would help you to manage your epilepsy alongside your learning and university experience?

[Visit gov.uk/browse/education](https://www.gov.uk/browse/education) for more information.

What does the law say?

The Equality Act 2010 exists to protect the rights of individuals, and make sure that people with a disability, or health condition, have the same rights as people who do not. This applies in many situations, from employment to transport, from property to education.

The Act means that an education provider (such as school, college or university) must not discriminate against someone with a disability and that it has to support people with disabilities within education.

If you are a young person with epilepsy, and you are considering going to university, you may have added concerns around your epilepsy and how it affects you.

Helpline 01494 601400
Confidential, national call rate.
Information and emotional support.
[Visit epilepsysociety.org.uk/helpline](https://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk/helpline)
for opening hours.

This means that a university:

- cannot discriminate against a student with a disability in deciding who can enrol on a course;
- must not discriminate against someone who has enrolled in what it provides, or offers to provide; and,
- has a duty to make reasonable adjustments for a student with a disability.

The Act also means you have the right to expect education providers to give you help and support. This might make university a realistic option for you.

Does this mean I am 'disabled'?

Being 'disabled' is sometimes seen as negative, a 'label' that defines who you are. And some people do not feel that their epilepsy is a disability or that they are disabled by it at all. But it is worth knowing what 'disabled' means in the law, and how considering epilepsy as a disability may mean you can expect support at university.

Under the Equality Act 2010, a person is considered to have a disability if they have "a physical or mental impairment" that has "a substantial and long-term adverse effect" on their "ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities". Here, a physical or mental impairment includes medical conditions such as epilepsy. 'Substantial' means not trivial or minor, and 'long-term' means at least 12 months. Day-to-day activities includes things like getting around, being able to remember and concentrate, and to get on with a 'normal' life.

So, looking at epilepsy and how it can affect an individual, we can see that it can be considered a disability.

By accepting your epilepsy as a disability, this means you have the right to expect to be protected against discrimination, and the right to expect support and help from the university.

Disability discrimination is when someone treats a person with a disability less well because of their disability. Universities have obligations to support and help people with disabilities so that they get the same access to courses and help to complete them.

But you can only expect this support and help if the university knows that you have a disability – if you don't tell them, they cannot be expected to know, and cannot be expected to help you.

Find out more about the Equality Act at equalityhumanrights.com (the Equality and Human Rights commission) and legislation.gov.uk (the Office of Public Sector information).

What should I do if I decide I want to go to university?

If you have decided that university is right for you, you need to find out more about applying to go. It might be a good idea to contact the disability support service at each university that you are thinking of applying to, before you apply, to find out what support they can offer you. You can discuss how your epilepsy affects you and what support the university can offer. This would help to get support in place for you at the start of your degree. Your school or sixth form college will also have plenty of information about applying.

Be aware that support you had at school does not transfer to university study. Talk to university disability support services as far in advance as possible. Things to consider could include accommodation adjustments, for example, if lack of sleep is a trigger for seizures, find out if quieter rooms are available. Discuss with the university disability support services how you might get assistance if you have a seizure in your room.

Other things to think about as early as possible, if relevant to you, could be bed sizes, bathrooms, any safety adjustments, ground floor rooms, lighting, catering or non-catering, what financial support is available, or what the emergency/evacuation procedure is. Since your epilepsy is individual to you, it is important to consider in advance, what support, if any, you may need.

Although starting university can be exciting, it can also be stressful for some people, which for some, can be a trigger for seizures. By being as prepared as possible, this may help to reduce stressful situations.

Visit ucas.ac.uk to find out more or visit epilepsysociety.org.uk/practicalities-going-university

For a printed copy of this information contact our helpline.

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