

## Know your epilepsy



Depending on how it affects you, having epilepsy may have an impact on your learning and university life. If you can find out what is available as early as possible, the support and help will be there if you need it.

General information about epilepsy can be helpful but how does it apply to you? Learning more about your own 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.

You may also think about developing coping strategies or ways to manage your epilepsy and seizures to reduce their effect on learning. Keeping a seizure diary can help to keep track. You can order printed seizure diaries from us or, download a copy from our website.

[Visit epilepsysociety.org.uk/seizure-diaries](https://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk/seizure-diaries)

## How do you prefer to learn?

Are you better with private study, group work, lectures, or practical work? 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?

The course prospectus, or the university, can give more information about how courses are run and assessed. If it would help to do the course over a longer period of time, you could contact the university to discuss whether this may be an option.

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 adviser to see what help they can offer.

## 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.

Managing your seizures so that you have the fewest seizures possible, and so that they have the least impact on you 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, or you can contact our helpline.

**Contact our helpline (see below)**

## Causes of epilepsy

There are lots of reasons why someone might have epilepsy and you may or may not know the cause of yours. 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 your concentration. Frontal lobe epilepsy may make planning and organising more challenging. Understanding the cause of your epilepsy may help you choose the right type of course for you.

## What impact do your epilepsy and seizures have?

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 make you 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 friends, lecturers, and tutors know about your epilepsy may help them to understand and support you better.

Helpline 0300 102 0024  
Confidential, information, and emotional support.  
Visit [epilepsysociety.org.uk/helpline](https://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk/helpline) for opening hours.

## Tiredness

If you have seizures, sometimes they may take some time to recover from. Some people may get back to 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. 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 trigger 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's seizures are 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 has side effects from medication but, they can make some people feel tired or drowsy, or they 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.

Some people find that taking anti-seizure medication (ASM) can affect their mood, and cause depression or anxiety.

Having epilepsy surgery can help to reduce, or completely stop, seizures for some people, but surgery itself can potentially cause problems, particularly with memory.

If you are being considered for epilepsy surgery, the possible impact of surgery, and how your 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 ask a friend to take lecture notes for you, or you could use a laptop to take notes.

You may be able to get a disabled students' allowance to help with the cost of a note-taker. You could contact the university in advance to see if they can offer note-taking support.

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

[Visit gov.uk/disabled-students-allowance-dsa](https://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowance-dsa)

## Concentration

Seizures can affect concentration both during and after 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, it might help to have someone take notes.

You might find that certain times of the day are better for you 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.

You may find that you need to take breaks more often than other students and it may be useful to discuss this with your tutors in advance.

## 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. Talking to your lecturers about what your seizures are like, how they affect you, and what you want to happen if you have one, might help to make sure you are treated how you want to be treated during, and after, a seizure.

If your seizures mean that you miss lectures, lecturers may be able to email you notes that you have missed, or the lectures may be posted online, or friends may be happy to share their notes.

Every effort is made to ensure that all information is correct at the time of publishing. 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.



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## 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. You may want to talk to your lecturers and tutors to plan for this.

## 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, and where, the placement will be, and getting in touch with them as soon as possible, might help them to understand your epilepsy.



Patient Information Forum

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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 as far as you are able, planning ahead, and making the most of what help and support is available.

If you would like to talk to someone about anything you have read here, you can call our confidential helpline. There are also a number of websites and forums that offer information and support.

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

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

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

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

[myplusstudentsclub.com/](https://myplusstudentsclub.com/)

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**For a printed copy of this information contact our helpline.**

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