

## Living with Epilepsy

Epilepsy is a common medical problem. It is a disorder of the brain which makes a person prone to seizures which happen when there is sudden, uncontrolled electrical activity in the brain. There are different types of seizures. Some seizures cause a person to lose consciousness and shake, whereas other types of seizures cause a person to move a part of their body or even just to stare.

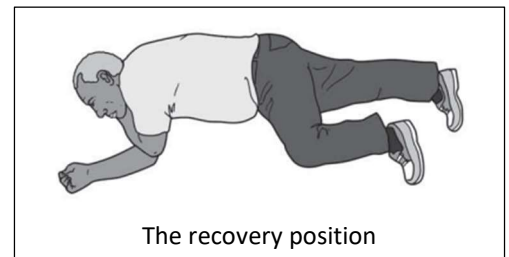
Epilepsy can be caused by an abnormality or damage to the brain such as after an injury or infection, but often the cause is not found. Epilepsy is not a mental illness and it is not contagious. It is not due to punishment from God, from witchcraft or from demon possession. Anyone can get epilepsy regardless of their nationality, age, social class or religion.

Although spiritual support and prayer is very important, epilepsy does require medication for treatment. Most people with epilepsy can live without seizures if they take medication correctly. They are able to work, go to school, have a family and lead an active life.

Follow up with your doctor is important. You must attend appointments as requested. Medication needs to be taken for a long time, sometimes for life. Occasionally people with epilepsy are able to stop medication but this should never be stopped suddenly or without instruction from a health professional, even if there are no longer seizures.

**What to do if a seizure occurs** (make sure that friends and relatives know how to manage a seizure):

1. Stay calm
2. Leave the person on the floor if they are safe; removing objects that might harm them
3. **Do not** put anything in their mouth or try to restrain them
4. Once the seizure stops (usually <5 minutes), roll them on their side (recovery position) until they wake up
5. If the seizure does not stop within 5 minutes, seek urgent medical help
6. Stay with the person until fully recovered
7. **Do not** give them anything to eat or drink until fully recovered



### Important information

- **Medication**
  - Take medication as prescribed every day
  - Do not run out of your medication
  - NEVER STOP TAKING YOUR MEDICATION SUDDENLY as this could cause a seizure
  - There may be particular side effects which your doctor will tell you about
- Check before starting any **new medication** that is it okay to take along with your anti-epileptic medication; tell your doctor if you have started any new medication.
- Avoid **getting tired**, drinking **alcohol** and anything else known to trigger seizures.
- **Safety** - avoid being alone e.g. playing or walking alone, living alone; avoid swimming or going into open water until seizures are well controlled and then never by yourself, avoid climbing trees or being at height, avoid being close to an open fire or operating dangerous machinery.
- **Driving** – a seizure whilst driving can cause death and serious injury to the driver, passengers and passers-by. A person who has seizures should not drive. Once seizures are well controlled (e.g. no seizure for at least one year) it may be possible to drive – you must discuss this with your doctor.
- **Women and girls of reproductive age** – there are certain risks associated with epilepsy and pregnancy. You need to speak to your doctor carefully about this *now* rather than to wait until you're pregnant. It is very important to plan pregnancies so that it is as safe as possible for you and the baby. Before starting any contraception, explain that you take epilepsy medication.

**Further support and information:**

[www.kawe-kenya.org](http://www.kawe-kenya.org)

[www.epilepsykenya.org](http://www.epilepsykenya.org)