

EPILEPSY DURHAM REGION

matters

Special Concerns About Epilepsy For Teenage Girls

The nurse who helps me with my epilepsy medication told me recently I was “going into puberty” and might “outgrow my dose.” What does that mean?

Puberty is a time when you physically change from a child into an adult. You get taller and weigh more, and start to grow breasts and body hair. Some of the physical changes happen quickly and the dose of seizure medicine that worked before is not enough for your new body size. Your doctor may order more frequent lab work to check the level of medication in your blood, to be sure you are taking enough medicine to keep your seizures controlled.

I’ve had “petit mal” seizures since I was in first grade. My doctor said I would probably outgrow them when I was a teenager. Is that true?

There are kinds of seizures that are almost always outgrown in teenage years. Petit mal seizures (also known as “childhood absence”) are an example. Your doctor will decide with you and your parents when it is safe to stop your medication. That doesn’t always work and you may still have seizures. It’s important to remember that most people with epilepsy can lead normal, fulfilling lives even if they do continue to take medication for seizures.

My friend takes a different medication for seizures. Which is the best one?

There are many good medications for seizures, and some work for one type of seizure better than they do for other types of seizures. Your doctor chooses your medication by your type of seizures, the pattern of the EEG, how well the medication works for you and if you experience any side effects from the medication.

I’ve started having monthly periods and I’ve heard this will make my seizures worse. Is that true?

There’s no way to tell if your seizures will change when you start your menstrual cycle. For most young women, there is no change in seizure pattern. However, some girls and women have more seizures just before or at the beginning of their periods. Although we don’t completely understand the cause, it seems related to hormonal changes. If you notice that your seizures seem worse around the time of your periods, talk to your doctor.

I’m scared my friends will find out about my seizures and will make fun of me. What should I do?

It’s your decision whether you tell people about your epilepsy, but it is sometimes hard to keep secrets from your best friends or people who spend a lot of time with. Many teens have found their friends supportive and understanding when they do decide to share this information. It may help to talk this over with your parents or another adult you trust and get their help in making the decision.

I have a boyfriend. What if I have a seizure when we are together?

It is normal for you to worry about this. He may be one of the people you tell about your seizure disorder, so there won’t be any unexpected surprises. People of all ages are more afraid of situations they don’t understand or anticipate. If your boyfriend knows what to expect, he will be able to help and support you if a seizure does occur. Perhaps one of your parents, or a nurse or a doctor can help you explain the facts about your seizures to special friends.

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My parents worry about me and won't let me do stuff with my friends. How can I get them to let me be more independent?

It's not uncommon for parents to be overprotective when their child has a medical problem, like epilepsy. It may be helpful to have your nurse or doctor talk to them about reasonable activities. You might have to take some extra precautions. Think through the activities you want to do, and be sure you would not be badly hurt if you had a seizure. For example, you should not participate in water sports without good supervision, and someone who knows about your seizures should ride the chairlift with you if you ski. Practice your negotiating skills to find a plan that is comfortable for both you and your parents.

My parents always lecture me about drinking and doing drugs. Everybody else does it. Why can't I?

Drinking alcohol when you are underage or using illegal drugs at any age is not good for anyone. If you have epilepsy, alcohol and drugs may increase the risk of you having seizures. Or they may cause you to have side effects from your medication. It's your decision to make, but weigh the odds against doing these things just because everyone else does.

Can I get a driver's license if I have seizures?

Provincial laws vary, but in Ontario you must be seizure free for at least twelve months in order to be eligible. Driving is a serious privilege, involving your safety and that of other people. If seizures keep you from getting a driver's license, be creative in finding other ways of getting around, like public transportation and sharing rides with friends.

My boyfriend and me are really in love. Can we get married if I have epilepsy?

Yes. Most people with seizures fall in love and marry just like anyone else. If you are serious about your relationship there are important issues for all young couples to consider. You need to understand the facts about your bodies and sexuality. Get information about sexually transmitted diseases, and if you are sexually active make sure you understand birth control options and safe sex.

Will I be able to have children?

Yes. Women with epilepsy get pregnant and most have normal, healthy babies. There are concerns related to seizure control, certain medications and a specific vitamin supplement called folic acid that are important to discuss with your doctor before you get pregnant. Having children is an important decision for any couple, and it requires planning and commitment. There may be some special adjustments if you have epilepsy, but there is no reason you can't be a successful parent.

I hate my seizures and having to take medication. Sometimes I go to my room and just explode.

Everyone with epilepsy feels angry and sad at times. Those feelings are normal. If you start to feel hopeless or overwhelmed, talk to your parents or some adult you trust, and get some help. Some people may need counseling to talk about their feelings, and learn ways to deal with stress. Don't ever be ashamed to ask for help. You're worth it.

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Charitable Registration 89670-5399-RR0001