

EPILEPSY DURHAM REGION



Epilepsy and Memory

It is not uncommon for people with epilepsy to complain of a poor memory, and the reasons vary. Memory problems may, for example, be due to epileptic activity or damage to areas of the brain responsible for registering (encoding) and recalling information.

Here is a list of common memory problems associated with common seizure types:

- **Frontal Lobe Seizures** - problems remembering to do things in the future because the frontal lobe is responsible for prospective memory.
- **Temporal Lobe Seizures** – difficulty remembering new things because the temporal lobe is responsible for new learning.
- **Left Side of the Brain Seizures** – problems remembering words and getting stuck in mid-conversation when they cannot think of the right word. This is because the left side of the brain is usually the side that controls language and words for the majority of most people. However language representation and verbal memory may be located in the brain differently if one had either early injury and/or early onset of seizures.

Memory can also be affected by many other factors including fatigue, anxiety, stress, depression as well as normal aging. It's important to have thorough investigations if memory problems have begun to affect the quality of your life.

Anti-Epileptic Drugs and Memory:

Controlling seizures with Anti-Epileptic Drugs can help to improve memory, simply by preventing seizure activity affecting the brain. However, memory difficulties can sometimes happen because of the side effects of taking Anti-Epileptic Drugs, such as drowsiness or attention problems or when there are toxic levels of the drug. Any adjustments to your medications must be done in consultation with your doctor.

Getting Help:

1. **What should you do if you think you have a problem with memory related to epilepsy?**

Talk to your doctor should you have any concerns about your memory. Having treated you and the different types of epilepsy, your doctor is in the best position to consider the probable impact of neurobiological factors like brain abnormalities and seizures as well as the effects of your epilepsy treatment.

Your doctor may refer you to see a neuropsychologist to test your memory and assess the degree and nature of disturbance, as there may be multiple factors present that are affecting your memory performance. You also may need other diagnostic procedures such as blood work, additional EEGs, or brain imaging. After your doctor has all the information, he or she will be able to discuss and explain the nature of your memory problem.

2. **I've been tested – now what?**

- After receiving all the medical and neuropsychological information, your doctor may choose to alter your medication (either by dose or type of medication).
- Other conditions affecting memory, such as mood and emotions, may also be treated. Some patients may be prescribed an anti-depressant or undergo psychotherapy to improve mood disturbance and/or self-esteem.
- It may be important to use compensatory strategies to help deal with memory problems (see below). It may be necessary to review with a professional the type of work you do or the plans for school if one has severe memory difficulties. Again depending on the factors underlying the memory problems, one may need to cope and adapt with living with memory difficulties.

EPILEPSY DURHAM REGION

matters



Things You Can Do: (tips to help memory)

1. Keep a journal/calendar to remind yourself of important events and appointments.
2. Make a "To Do List" of daily chores.
3. Break down the material into manageable amounts of material.
4. Have a note pad beside the phone and make sure to write down anything important (e.g. caller's name and phone number, date, reason for calling). If there is an important meeting with the bank for example, take a friend or family member with you to help recall the details of the discussion.
5. Create a system or routine so you don't forget to take your medication! A great way is to use a pill organizer. Another method is to program the alarm on your cell phone or watch to remind you to take your pill during the day.
6. Be healthy – exercising, getting good sleep, and eating well can both have positive effects on your memory. Also, keep your mind stimulated – read a book, take a course, or do a puzzle.
7. Relax. Our memory often fails us when we are rushed or stressed, so take the time needed to store and recall information. Do not try to force yourself to remember things, the more you try, the less likely you will.
8. Keep things in the same place (e.g. keys, cheque book). Let the people you live with know you are doing this for a reason to ensure they will not to move these items.
9. Create strategies and methods to help you remember. For example: associate pictures with people's names, use rhymes to learn a list of important words, or mentally retrace your steps to try and remember where you left something. Remember that mnemonics or tricks to enhance memory recall can become too complicated. You need to use strategies that work for you and the situation that you are dealing with.
10. Repetition and review may not always work for everyone. Using notebooks and tape recorders may be necessary if there are a lot of details to remember. For students with memory difficulties, you may need to speak to a student advisor or the counseling center to ask for special assistance or accommodations when you are in class or writing exams.

Be kind to yourself. Everyone forgets things and we each remember things differently. Different methods works better for others so it's important to find which works best for you! If you do forget something, simply ask someone for help and forgive yourself. Reward yourself when you do remember things.

SOURCES:

- Epilepsy Action - <http://www.epilepsy.org.uk/info/memory.html>
- Suggests helpful tips to improve your memory
- Epilepsy.com - http://www.epilepsy.com/articles/ar_1063660975.html
- Provides answers to diagnosing and treating memory problems
- National Society for Epilepsy - <http://www.epilepsynse.org.uk/pages/info/leaflets/memory.cfm>
- Offers detailed answers to questions on epilepsy and memory, and how to deal with memory difficulties

Reprinted with permission of the BC Epilepsy Society.

You can join Epilepsy Durham Region as a member and receive program and service benefits.

get the facts
www.epilepsydurham.com

Charitable Registration 89670-5399-RR0001