



EPILEPSY SUPPORT ASSOCIATION UGANDA

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EPILEPSY AND THE ELDERLY PERSON

Of the total population who are diagnosed with epilepsy for the first time, only 2% are elderly people for the first time, only 2% are elderly people. The physical changes related with ageing are most likely the cause of epilepsy.

CAUSES OF EPILEPSY IN OLDER PEOPLE

- Epilepsy in an elderly person could be the return of a seizure disorder that was in remission for many years.
- Strokes can cause seizures because of the hemorrhage and damage to the brain itself.
- Diseases such as heart attacks and Alzheimer's can cause changes in the brain that may lead to seizures.
- Diseases of the kidneys, liver and even diabetes may cause diabetes in later life.
- Alcoholism/alcoholism can trigger seizures or latent epilepsy.
- Brain tumors of any kind may cause seizures.
- Post traumatic and post operative traumas can cause epilepsy.
- Surgery to the brain can leave a scar that may cause seizures.
- Positive family history of epilepsy
- Physical changes of old age
- Multiple sclerosis
- Meningitis
- Narrow or clogged arteries

EPILEPSY AND THE PROCESS OF AGING

Decrease in mental alertness, mood changes and memory loss can be caused by several health problems associated with ageing. There may also be other explanations for the change in behavior of the elderly person

❖ TOXICITY

The therapeutic levels of anti-convulsant medication need to be monitored through regular blood tests. If the levels are too high it could cause toxicity, which could, in turn, manifest as dizziness and confusion.

❖ DRUG INTERACTION



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The elderly person is most likely taking a variety of medication for different medical reasons. These drugs can interact and produce negative side effects. It is therefore of utmost importance to discuss possible drug interactions with the doctor and/or pharmacist.

❖ SENSITIVITY

A negative reaction to drugs may result in depression, agitation, confusion or loss of memory. Monitor any changes in sleeping eating patterns. It is possible that the person is sensitive to specific drugs. Consult with the doctor and never change or stop medication without the doctor's advice.

THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF EPILEPSY ON THE ELDERLY

- The first seizure is a very traumatic experience with far reaching social consequences
- An elderly person may feel useless and of little value to society. Loneliness, physical changes, the fact that they cannot live independently or drive a vehicle can cause depression. This is even worse for the elderly person with epilepsy
- The elderly person has a higher risk of sustaining head injuries or fractures due to frequent falls.
- They may feel as if they have lost control over their own lives and feel uncertain about their future
- The elderly person with epilepsy can become socially isolated
- If the person does not experience an aura (a warning sensation that occurs prior to a seizure) the person will need to adjust accordingly to the DOs and Don'ts.

MEDICATION

Memory problems often affect people with epilepsy. Epilepsy medicine works best when blood levels remain steady. The correct dosage must be taken at specific times to maintain blood levels and to achieve optimum therapeutic results.

It can be difficult to keep track of when to drink what medication and therefore we suggest:

- A pillbox/ dispenser divided into segments according to the time and day is useful
- Pills can also be packed in sachets marked with the specific hour of the day and day of the week
- A wristwatch with an alarm can be helpful to remind someone when to take their medication
- A friend or family member can be asked to assist in keeping track of reordering dates and mark the calendar accordingly.



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DO & DONTs

- Remember fire, heat and water are dangerous to any person with epilepsy
- Do not smoke or abuse alcohol if you have epilepsy
- Avoid carrying hot dishes or boiling water in a kettle
- Set the water temperature on the geyser lower to prevent the water from burning you.
- Do not bath or shower in excessively hot water as it may bring on seizures
- Avoid ironing if at all possible
- You can drown in very little water. If possible shower instead of taking a bath and do not lock the bathroom door.
- Wear rubber gloves when handling or washing glassware
- Place a screen in front of open fires and do not carry hot ashes
- If possible avoid staying in a house or flat with stairs. You may fall down on the stairs while having a seizure
- Carpeted floors and padded furniture provide more protection.
- Protective and padding can be used on sharp corners of tables to prevent injuries.
- Keep in touch with family or friends with beepers and/or portable phones.
- A medic Alert bracelet can be useful to identify a person while having a seizure enabling the public to be of assistance.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER:

- Do not emphasise what the elderly can do, not what he or she cannot do (while at the same time taking sensible precautions).
- Do treat the elderly person like everyone else in the family.
- Do help your elderly integrate into as many social activities as possible, with the necessary precautions, enabling a health social life.
- Do allow the elderly person to make his/her own decisions where possible.
- Don't over protect the elderly. Allow the person to identify his or her own strengths and weaknesses.
- Don't blame the elderly's epilepsy if the family experiences difficulties.

Should you have any further concerns about taking care of the elderly you can contact an Epilepsy Support Association Uganda which offers advice on various issues concerning the elderly.