



DRIVING & YOU



Information
for people
with seizure
disorders



**EPILEPSY
FOUNDATION®**

Not another moment lost to seizures™



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This pamphlet is for general information only.

Decisions about driving should be made
only after discussion with your doctor and
in accordance with state driving rules.

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IF YOU'RE
READING THIS
PAMPHLET
IT'S PROBABLY
BECAUSE
YOU'VE BEEN
HAVING
SEIZURES.

Seizures are caused by sudden changes in how your brain works. Seizures can make you black out for seconds or minutes. Or they may make you shake, jerk, or not be able to move.

Seizures may be called falling out, fits or spells in some places. Another name for seizures that happen over and over, often for no special reason, is a seizure disorder or epilepsy.

People who have seizures or epilepsy often have questions about how it will affect their lives.

The Epilepsy Foundation gets hundreds of questions every year from people who want to know whether they can drive.

These are the ones we hear the most:

Q. If I have epilepsy or seizures, can I still drive?

A. You may be able to drive if your seizures are controlled with treatment and you meet the licensing requirements in your state.

Every state has laws about how long you must be seizure-free before you can drive.

Some states will give you a license if you have not had any seizures for three months.

Other states may require you to remain seizure-free for six months to one year before you can get a license.

The Epilepsy Foundation has been working hard to make these rules fairer for people with epilepsy. If you think you've been unfairly treated, find out how to appeal the decision of your motor vehicle administration or department of motor vehicles.

Q. How can I find out about the law in my state?

A. Check with your local Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) or Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA), where you would go to apply for a license. You can also check the Epilepsy Foundation's Web site (www.EpilepsyFoundation.org) for rules about epilepsy and driving in your state.

Q. Do I have to tell them I have epilepsy when I go for a license?

A. Yes. There will be a list of medical conditions on the application. Like epilepsy, some will be conditions that can cause lapses of consciousness. Losing consciousness while driving can cause an accident.

Epilepsy, seizures, or seizure disorder will be on that list.

You must check any medical condition that you have that's on that list.

TIP FOR SAFER DRIVING

Always take epilepsy medicine every day on time.

TIP FOR SAFER DRIVING

If you've been driving for several hours and you're tired, pull off the road and rest.

Q. Is there anything else I have to do?

A. Like anyone else, you'll have to pass a written test and a driving test. Your state may have other things that you need to do.

Q. If I can say I haven't had any seizures and I pass the other tests, will I get a license?

A. The state may say that your doctor has to send Motor Vehicles a letter about your seizures and treatment.

The letter would tell them what medicine you are taking and how long it has been since your last seizure.

Your doctor may also have to say whether she thinks you can drive safely.

Q. Suppose I get my license and then I have some seizures. Will they take my license away?

A. In most states you would have to tell Motor Vehicles you've been having seizures again. Your license might be taken away until you have met the state's required seizure-free period.

Q. How long would that take?

A. You'd probably have to be seizure-free for three months, six months, or 12 months, just as if you were applying in your state for the first time. Or, your doctor might be asked about when you could safely drive again.

Q. I have seizures only when I sleep. I've never had one during the day. Can I get a license?

A. Some states will give you a license if you have seizures only during sleep (nocturnal seizures). Your doctor would have to write a letter saying you have this kind of seizure.

Q. My doctor was changing my medicine and I had a few seizures. Now I'm not having any. Do I still have to give up my license?

A. You could explain what happened to Motor Vehicles. Get a letter from your doctor about the medicine change. You may be able to keep your license in some states.

TIP FOR SAFER DRIVING

If your medicine is changed, ask your doctor about driving. Don't drive until you know how the change makes you feel.

Q. I lose consciousness during a seizure, but I always know when I'm going to have one. I'd always have time to pull over. Why can't I drive?

A. You may be able to drive in some states. Again, your doctor might have to write a letter to Motor Vehicles about your seizures and whether the warning you get is enough to allow you to drive safely.

Q. I had a seizure while driving. I hit a tree but was okay. No one took my license away. I still have it. Does that mean I can still drive?

A. No. Having a license in your hand doesn't mean you can or should drive. You should drive only if you have not been having ANY seizures for however long your state says you have to be seizure free.

If you've had a seizure, stop driving and give up your license until you can get it back legally.

Q. What would happen if I drove without a license?

A. You would be breaking the law and you would be taking great risks.

If you had a seizure and caused an accident, you could be charged with a serious crime.

If you had a seizure and had an accident that hurt or killed another person, you could go to prison.

If you had a seizure and had an accident, your insurance would not cover the expenses.

TIP FOR SAFER DRIVING

Don't drive if you're very tired or have been going without sleep.

Q. Suppose I had a license and I had a seizure just because I'd run out of medicine. Would I have to give the license up?

A. You should tell Motor Vehicles and tell them why you stopped taking the medicine.

If you have epilepsy, and you drive, your medicine is your lifeline.

It protects you and every other driver around you. You should never, ever, let yourself run out.

Q. Is it okay to drive if I've missed only a few tablets?

A. No. If you haven't been taking your medicine, don't drive.

Don't even drive to the drug store to get more. Have your doctor call it in. Get the drug store to deliver, or have a friend pick it up.

Wait until you've been taking your medicine again regularly before you drive .

If you don't take your medicine, you are at high risk of having a seizure. Don't let it happen behind the wheel.

Q. I take medicine and I have a VNS (vagus nerve stimulation) implant to keep seizures from happening. If I feel a seizure coming on, I use a special magnet to make it stop. Can I drive?

A. Your doctor can advise you about driving with a VNS implant. However, if you're still having seizures, you shouldn't drive.

Stopping a seizure with a VNS magnet doesn't mean that you won't have a seizure later that you won't be able to stop.

If you feel a seizure coming on at any time, stop. Even if the VNS magnet works, don't continue to drive. Get home another way.

Keep a cell phone in your car to call for help.

TIP FOR SAFER DRIVING

Don't drink alcohol if you're going to drive. That's good advice for everyone. If you have epilepsy, alcohol may make you have a seizure.

Q. Will my doctor tell the DMV if I have a seizure?

A. If you live in California, Delaware, Nevada, New Jersey, Oregon, or Pennsylvania your doctor must tell Motor Vehicles if you have had a seizure.

In other states, a doctor is not required to report a patient who has been treated for or diagnosed with epilepsy. The doctor may report you only if you were driving even though you were still having seizures and he'd told you not to drive.

This might happen if he feels you are a danger on the road.

TIP FOR SAFER DRIVING

Follow the licensing rules in your state. You can find them at www.EpilepsyFoundation.org.

Q. I need to drive to get to work. I still have seizures sometimes. What can I do?

A. Can you carpool with other workers, and pay for part of the gas?

Can you take a bus or other public transport?

Can you move closer to your job so you can get there more easily?

If biking to work is an option, ask your doctor whether this would be safe for you.

Check with your local transit authority on whether you may be eligible for paratransit services; this is a transportation service required under the Americans with Disabilities Act for persons with disabilities who cannot use the regular public transportation system independently.

Find out if there is a program to help people with disabilities get to their jobs.

It is hard not to be able to drive, but if you are having seizures and you drive, you could hurt yourself and others. Your life would never be the same.

TIP FOR SAFER DRIVING

Report all seizures to your doctor.

THE FUTURE

Many people with epilepsy drive safely on our nation's highways.

They take their medicines regularly. They are not having seizures. They follow the driving laws in their states.

Some of these people had to wait months, even years, before they could drive safely. And they did.

If you can't drive now because you are still having seizures, check with your doctor.

There may be new medicines or other treatments that would give you a better chance at control.

Don't give up. Stay safe.

To find out more about the
driving laws in your state, call the
Epilepsy Foundation at 1-800-332-1000
or visit www.epilepsyfoundation.org.



1-800-332-1000

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