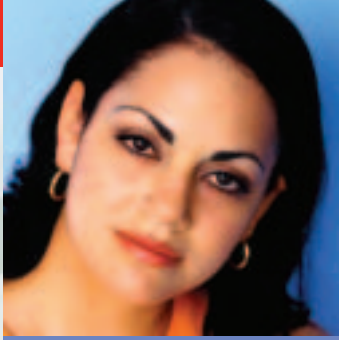


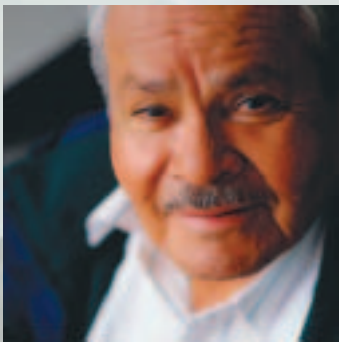
✓ Quick Read Series



# Seizures & Sleep



Information  
for people  
with seizure  
disorders



® EPILEPSY FOUNDATION®



EPILEPSY  
FOUNDATION®

© 2003 Epilepsy Foundation of America, Inc.

This pamphlet is designed to provide general information about epilepsy to the public. It does not include medical advice. People with epilepsy should not make changes in treatment or activities based on this information without first consulting a physician.

## ABOUT SLEEP

Have you ever found yourself saying, “I’m tired all the time but I just don’t seem to be able to get a good night’s sleep?”

Most of us know what it’s like to toss and turn and struggle to get the sleep we know we need.

Lack of sleep can leave us tired and irritable the following day.

But if we have epilepsy (seizures), lack of sleep, or troubled sleep, may affect us even more.

It may make us more likely to have seizures.

Doctors are discovering that sleep and seizures are linked in many ways, some of them surprising.

They’re even finding that some stages of sleep are more likely than others to trigger seizures.

### A GOOD NIGHT TIP

- **Avoid caffeine drinks (coffee, tea, colas) after six o'clock in the evening.**

## A GOOD NIGHT TIP

- A warm bath before bed may help you sleep.

## ABOUT SEIZURES

A seizure is a sudden change in awareness, actions, or feelings that you can't control.

Having a seizure is a sign that something has affected the electrical system that makes your brain work.

For a minute or two, it has changed the way your brain controls the rest of your body.

During a seizure, a person may fall and shake, or black out, or have uncontrollable shaking, or sudden muscle jerks.

When seizures happen from time to time, doctors say that the person has epilepsy. Some people call epilepsy a seizure disorder.

Epilepsy is treated with medicines. If they are taken every day, most of them do a good job of preventing seizures.

Another way of preventing seizures is to find out whether there are things that make seizures more likely to happen.

Lack of sleep, or disturbed sleep, is one of those things.

For some of us, better sleep can mean a better life — and fewer seizures.

### A GOOD NIGHT TIP

- Read for a while before you turn out the light.

## SLEEP AND SEIZURES

Sleep can affect seizures and seizures can affect sleep in many ways.

Some people have seizures only while they are asleep.

Some people are most likely to have seizures just after they wake up in the morning.

And some people have seizures while they are asleep without realizing it. All they know is that sometimes they wake up with aching muscles and a bitten tongue.

## HOW SLEEP WORKS

When we go to sleep, how our brains work changes in special ways.

Those changes, in some people, make it more likely that they will have a seizure.

Doctors have found there are different kinds of sleep. In one kind of sleep, our eyes dart back and forth under closed eyelids.

It's called REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep. People with epilepsy, it seems, are less likely to have seizures during this stage of sleep.

Another type of sleep is much deeper. If people have seizures when they are asleep, they are more likely to happen during deep sleep.

### A GOOD NIGHT TIP

- Don't eat a heavy meal late at night.

## SLEEP DISTURBANCES

If people with epilepsy go for many hours without sleep, they are more likely to have a seizure.

## A GOOD NIGHT TIP

- Use earplugs to get to sleep if you live in a noisy environment.

So it's helpful to know what kinds of things can get in the way of a good night's sleep.

Some people snore loudly. Some people stop breathing for a few seconds. They may do it several times during the night. It is called sleep apnea.

Studies show that lots of people with epilepsy also have sleep apnea. In some cases, it may be caused by the medicines they take to prevent seizures.

Both heavy snoring and breaks in breathing interfere with calm, restful sleep. And that, again, can lead to more seizures.

If you or a loved one are having seizures at night, check with your doctor.

If you know you snore loudly or have pauses in breathing that are interfering with sleep and leaving you tired in the morning, tell your doctor.

He or she may suggest ways to treat those conditions. Treating heavy snoring or pauses in breathing may improve your sleep.

And better sleep may make it less likely that you will have a seizure.

## A GOOD NIGHT TIP

- Try some relaxation exercises at bedtime, or play relaxing music at a low level.

## TREATMENT CHANGES

People with epilepsy already take medicines to prevent seizures.

If they're also having seizures at night, their doctors may suggest changes in how and when the meds are taken.

For example, the doctor might increase how much medicine a person takes right before bedtime.

A higher dose during the day might make someone too sleepy to get on with everyday life.

But a higher dose at night might be just what's needed to produce restful sleep.

## THINGS TO AVOID

Seizures, snoring and pauses in breathing are not the only things that disturb sleep.

Going to bed late, drinking caffeine drinks, or having a heavy meal late in the evening, can make it harder to sleep well at night.

Taking lots of naps during the day can also make it harder to get to sleep at night.

Using alcohol may help you fall asleep but is likely to wake you up a few hours later.

### A GOOD NIGHT TIP

- **Avoid alcohol – it may help you fall asleep only to wake up again in the middle of the night.**

## LOOKING AHEAD

If you have nighttime seizures, or if you don't sleep well and feel tired and worn out all day, there may be better days ahead.

Doctors are recognizing that some sleep problems are caused by seizures. And that sleep itself may, in one way or another, lead to seizures.

New knowledge, and new ways of treating both sleep disturbances and seizures may make a big difference in your life.

So that finally, you'll get a really good night's rest — every night.

## A GOOD NIGHT TIP

- Invest in a comfortable mattress.

## TO FIND OUT MORE

Call the Epilepsy Foundation toll-free at 1-800-332-1000, or visit [www.epilepsyfoundation.org](http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org), or write:

Epilepsy Foundation  
435 I Garden City Drive  
Landover, MD 20785

Your local Epilepsy Foundation can help you get in touch with people in your town or city who can help you.



The Quick Read Series  
is supported by an unrestricted  
educational grant from



**EPILEPSY FOUNDATION<sup>®</sup>**

1-800-332-1000

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