

## **Epilepsy & Employment**

Most people with epilepsy today manage to hold down a job successfully. True, epilepsy can sometimes pose problems at work and some people with epilepsy may find it hard to obtain a job that uses their skills and experience to the full. However, very few jobs are barred by law to people whose seizures are under control and with patience, perseverance and a positive outlook, you should be able to find work that you enjoy and that uses your skills and talents.

This booklet gives some practical advice for those readers seeking employment, but worried about what impact their epilepsy will have. Further advice on any of the issues mentioned is available.

What to tell your employer:

- \*The type of epilepsy you have and how it affects you, include how often and when you have seizures.

- \*Whether you have a warning of aura before having a seizure

- \*How long your seizures normally last

- \*What should be done if you have a seizure

Some employers know very little about epilepsy. For example they may assume-wrongly-that-you cannot use a computer or VDU because of photosensitivity (abnormal sensitivity to flickering light). It's up to you to get the facts across in an accurate and matter of fact way.

- \*Telling people you work with

Once you have found a job it's up to you to decide what to tell your workmates. This can be tricky, but we at BEA believe that it is best to be honest. If other people know about your epilepsy and what to expect if you have a seizure there is less likelihood of embarrassment and anxiety all round.

- \*Think about doing some further training. Good job skills will stand you in good stead, whether or not you have epilepsy.

Problems jobs for people with epilepsy

Certain jobs are completely barred by law to people with epilepsy, while others are governed by health regulations (for instance you may need to have been seizure-free for a period of time before applying). The rules governing employment can also depend on whether you have an established history of epilepsy when you apply for a job or whether you develop it while you are in post. The rules are complicated and subject to changes so the advice here is only general. For more specific advice contact our Helpline.

Jobs that are subject to special rules include: aircraft pilot; ambulance driver; armed services; coastguard; drivers; fir brigade; LGV/PCV and taxi drivers, merchant seafarer; nurse and midwife; police; prison service; teacher in a state school; train driver.

Some activities pose special dangers for people whose seizures are not controlled. These include jobs which involve working.

- \*At unprotected heights
- \*Near open water
- \*With high voltage or open circuit electricity
- \*With babies or young children
- \*Which requires regular overseas tours of duty. For instance some civil service posts.
- \*With unguarded apparatus or machines
- \*On or near moving vehicles
- \*With chemicals, unguarded fires, ovens and hot plates
- \*On isolated sites
- \*Handling valuable fragile equipment or objects.

Most people with epilepsy can work without worrying about safety issues. However, some jobs are more risky if seizures are frequent, involve loss of consciousness, and happen without warning. Jobs can often be made safer with a few changes. Employers are, in many cases, required by law to make such changes or accommodations.

- \*Review any job-related risks that apply to you. Can something be changed to improve safety?
- \*Consider telling your co-workers you have epilepsy and the correct first aid for the type of seizures you have. This often helps calm fears and corrects any strange ideas they may have about seizure first aid.
- \*Climb only as high as you can safely fall, especially on a concrete floor, unless you are protected by a reliable safety harness and wearing a secure hard hat or helmet.
- \*When working around machinery, check for safety features, such as automatic shut offs or safety guards.
- \*Try to keep consistent work hours so you don't have to go a long time without sleep.
- \*If you are sensitive to flashing lights, try to limit your exposure. Look away if you can. Use dark glasses. Some people think blue lenses work best.
- \*Does stress make your seizures worse? Is your job a very stressful one? If so, look at ways to reduce stress on the job.
- \*Depending on your job and demands of work site, consider wearing protective clothing if you have frequent seizures.
- \*Keep a small pillow tucked away in a drawer so a co-worker (who knows where it is and what to do with it) can place it under your head if you have a generalized tonic clonic (grand mal) seizure.
- \*Keep a change of clothes at work in case your clothes get soiled during a seizure.

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