

Parents with Epilepsy?

Introduction

The arrival of a new baby usually means a review of the normal safety procedures in your home. If you are the parent of the new baby and you have epilepsy you may need to take extra care to ensure the well being of your child. A few simple precautions can reduce the risk of accidents and prevent unnecessary anxiety for you as a parent. Some of the following precautions may be more relevant than other, depending on your types of seizures. A parent who has frequent seizures, without warning and involving loss of consciousness, will need to take more care than a parent who rarely has seizures, and who has a reliable warning of an attack coming on.

General Safety Rules

When you take your new baby home the health visitor will be an excellent source of advice on baby care and general safety procedures during childhood. There are standard precautions which any parent with a baby or young child should think about, and these apply equally to the parent with epilepsy.

You may consider a gate at the kitchen entrance which will ensure that an inquisitive toddler cannot reach a hot cooker while your attention is diverted or if you are unconscious as a result of a seizure.

A cooker guard is also a good idea to prevent hot pans being pulled over.

A stair-gate is a wise precaution in a home with easy access to the stairs, and the use of a playpen is recommended when domestic chores such as ironing is being done.

A sturdy gate with a secure lock is essential when the child is playing outside.

Covers for electric sockets which are plain, flat-surfaced and difficult to remove, are available from ironmongers.

Bathing: If you have seizures which involve loss of consciousness it is a good idea only to bath the baby when someone else is at home. At other times you may choose to sponge the child in its cot or on a waterproof sheet on the floor, with the basin of water well out of reach, where it cannot be knocked over if a seizure occurs. Plastic babysitters which hold a child in place in the bath are available.

Carrying: If you are subject to very frequent seizures, without warning and involving loss of consciousness, you may prefer to avoid carrying the baby in your arms if you are alone. You could attach wheels to a carry-cot and wheel the baby alongside you.

Feeding: Whether you are a mum breastfeeding or a dad bottlefeeding your baby, you can reduce the risk of dropping the child in the event of a seizure. Sit on the floor with your back to the wall and a cushion on either side so that the baby does not have far to fall if you lose consciousness. If you bottlefeed your baby and tend to fall in the same direction each time, hold the baby on the opposite side so that you fall away from, instead

of towards, the child. Most high chairs nowadays are adaptable, and you should consider setting the chair at its lowest height, and sitting alongside on the floor while feeding an older baby.

Nappy changing: Again, this activity is best carried out on a waterproof mat on the floor. Avoid changing the baby on furniture such as bed where the baby may roll and fall off if unattended. Kneel at the side of the mat while you are changing the nappy, where you will avoid falling on the child in the event of a seizure.

Medicines: Many new mums are anxious that the medicines which they take for their epilepsy will be passed on in their milk if they breastfeed their child. The amount that is passed on will in most cases be negligible and is unlikely to affect the child. Ask your doctor to advise on this. Children love to imitate adults, and a toddler who watches a parent take tablets every day may be tempted to copy the action. Keep all medicines out of the reach of your child.

Outside the home: When you take your baby out in the pram you may consider tying a length of cord from your wrist or waist so that the pram will not run away if you let go of the handle during a seizure. The cord should be long enough so that you do not pull the pram over when you fall.

Reins will prevent a toddler from wandering off if you have a seizure in the street, but the child should always carry identification in case of this eventuality. However, even a very young child can learn to sit by your side while you recover.

Explaining Epilepsy: Your child will naturally be alarmed if a seizure occurs without any warning or explanation. It is therefore important that you start explaining your epilepsy to your child as early as possible, expanding on details as the child grows up.

Relationships: A new baby can put stress on the relationship between any parents, and this stress can be exaggerated if the couple feel anxious about the effect on epilepsy on their family. Open and frank discussion about each other's feelings can often reduce this stress and sometimes prevent it altogether. However, both parents should be sympathetic and understand each other's needs. Parents may feel 'distanced' from their baby by the safety precautions they have to take whilst at home on their own, and may need time when their partner is around to hold and cuddle their baby.

Conclusion

If you are a parent with epilepsy you will have been taking safety precautions at home before the new baby arrives. The extra care required to ensure that your child enjoys an accident-free home will only be an extension of your existing safety procedures. A new addition to your family should be a time of pleasure which should not be marred by unnecessary anxieties. If you have further concerns, contact the Epilepsy Society of Malta.

