



Ten things you should know

Ten things you should know about epilepsy in people in their later years

1. Epilepsy, while a common neurological condition, carries with it serious consequences.
2. People aged 65 years and over are more likely to develop epilepsy than younger people.
3. Seizures present with more subtle symptoms in people in their later years.
4. There are a number of risk factors associated with developing epilepsy in people in their later years.
5. Focal seizures (affecting just one part of the brain) are the most common type of seizure experienced by people in their later years.
6. Symptoms experienced by people in their later years are thought to be part of the ageing process and can be a sign of seizures.
7. Stroke is a very common cause for developing epilepsy, particularly in the first year after a stroke.
8. People with dementia have an increased risk of developing epilepsy.
9. Treatments for people with epilepsy in their later years can be more complex due to other medical conditions.
10. People in their later years experience different responses in the way drugs are absorbed, broken down or cleared from the body.

What does this mean for the older person?

Determining a diagnosis of epilepsy is often challenging in older people and can take a long time.

Changes in behaviour should never be ignored as they may be symptoms of an underlying medical condition such as epilepsy.

Seizure symptoms can present differently in older people and everyone's epilepsy diagnosis, presentation, treatment and impact is different.

Having a current Epilepsy Management Plan (EMP) is therefore important for peace of mind and good health management.

Where to go for further information?

Epilepsy in the later years
information sheets
www.epilepsyfoundation.org.au

Epilepsy Foundation
www.epilepsyfoundation.org.au

Epilepsy Australia
www.epilepsyaustralia.net

Epilepsy YouTube
www.youtube.com/user/EpilepsyVictoria

Epilepsy Smart
www.epilepsysmart.org.au

What can you do to help?

- 1. Be aware of risks.** Older people with epilepsy are at increased risk of experiencing falls which can cause severe injuries including fractures or traumatic brain injuries. Social isolation as a result of seizure activity may also occur. Being aware of risks is important when supporting an older person living with epilepsy.
- 2. Be aware of signs of seizures.** Older people are at a higher risk of seizure activity and epilepsy, being aware of the signs of seizure activity ensures that you can provide the appropriate supports and referrals as required.
- 3. Be aware of risk factors.** Risk factors associated with developing epilepsy include lifestyle factors such as alcohol, smoking, sleep deprivation and stress. Being aware of these and support an older person to embrace a healthy lifestyle to reduce risk.
- 4. Record behavioural changes.** Focal seizures start in one part of the brain and may or may not spread to other regions and can present in a manner which is not always identified as seizure related. Aged care workers and carers should ensure that they record, for further investigation, any changes in behaviour which may indicate a possible seizure.
- 5. Record any loss of awareness.** Blank stares or loss of awareness and blackout spells are not always a sign of seizures. It is important before a diagnosis has been made to record in detail when symptoms like this are experienced so that a history can be used by the specialist to make an accurate diagnosis.
- 6. Monitor for signs of seizure activity after a stroke.** If an older person has had a stroke close monitoring for any signs of seizure activity is recommended, especially in the first year after a stroke.
- 7. Monitor for signs of seizure activity in an older person with dementia.** If an older person has dementia, particularly Alzheimer's Disease close monitoring for any signs of seizure activity not dementia related.
- 8. Monitor medication effects.** People in their later years may have multiple health conditions in addition to epilepsy so their medications are complex and require monitoring for adverse effects.
- 9. Ensure regular medical reviews.** Regular reviews with a doctor is important as anti-epileptic drug levels in the blood can fluctuate significantly due to differences in the way drugs are absorbed in later years.
- 10. Monitor seizure activity after diagnosis.** Seizure symptoms in older people are more subtle than in any other age group therefore blank stares or loss of awareness and blackout spells, confusion or memory problems could be signs of a possible seizure. It is important to monitor seizure activity after a diagnosis has been made, as adjustments to medication may be required.

This resource sheet is part of a suite of resources targeted to aged care workers and carers of older people, to assist with caring for older people living with epilepsy.

The information contained in this publication provides general information about epilepsy. It does not provide specific advice. Specific health and medical advice should always be obtained from an appropriately qualified health professional.

Epilepsy Foundation, 587 Canterbury Road, Surrey Hills, VIC 3127, Australia, Telephone: (03) 8809 0600.
www.epilepsyfoundation.org.au