



Exercising with epilepsy

Every move counts

Move more and reduce your sedentary time each day by incorporating different types of movement. It is never too late to start, some is always better than none!

How to get started

Regular exercise benefits people with epilepsy because it often reduces seizure frequency, relieves depression, reduces social isolation, and promotes heart and overall health. It also helps you maintain a healthy body weight, improve immunity, enhance sleep quality and helps you to feel revitalized. Regular exercise also reduces stress, blood pressure, blood sugar levels and significantly improves bone health. Some medicines affect bone health so regular strength training will help protect your bones against osteoporosis.

Ask your doctor or neurologist if your epilepsy is stable and controlled enough to start a regular exercise plan. Your exercise plan should be designed to maximize the benefits with the fewest risks of aggravating your condition.

Take all medicines as recommended by your doctor or pharmacist.

Warm up and cool down

Always start your exercise session with a 10–15-minute warm up to loosen up the muscles and raise the heart rate safely. Warm-up exercises include dynamic stretches, range-of-motion activities and low intensity movements. This can be done standing up, walking around, marching on the spot or seated.

Always end your exercise session with a 10–15-minute cool-down to ensure your heart rate and breathing rate return to normal safely. Cool down exercises include slowly decreasing the intensity of your activity and simple stretches.

Be active

Some is good, more is better

How much:	Aim for at least 150 – 300 minutes a week of moderate intensity or at least 75–150 minutes a week of vigorous intensity physical activity. Start moving more each day increasing to regular movement every day and add sessions as your strength and stamina improve.
How hard:	Any movement helps. Aim for moderate to vigorous intensity—aim to get slightly breathless. Take frequent breaks, if necessary. Increase intensity when you are comfortable exercising at this level.
How long:	Aim to spread out your sessions throughout the week. If your fitness level is low, start with 5–10-minute sessions and add 10-minute intervals until you can comfortably exercise for longer.

What type:	All physical activity counts. Try activities within your abilities: walking, cycling in a safe environment, dancing (e.g. avoid strobe lights), gym-based rowing, jogging or a recreational sport. Avoid contact sports or activities that risk falling and unsupervised aquatic activities to minimize the risk of head injury or a seizure trigger. Household activities such as cleaning, gardening, vacuuming or walking your dog are great activities for your health.
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What will it do for me?

Regular exercise helps to reduce seizure activity, maintain a healthy body weight, improve bone health and reduce the risks of obesity, type 2 diabetes, stress, depression, some cancers and heart disease.

Build strength

How much:	At least twice a week.
How hard:	Start with light muscle strengthening exercises and progress to moderate or greater intensities over time.
How long:	Choose 8–10 exercises targeting the upper and lower body and repeat each exercise 10–15 times. Try 1–3 sets of each exercise.
What type:	Try weight or resistance training, or a circuit class using weight equipment. At home, try squats, calf raises, wall push-ups, arm curls, knee curls, front and side arm raise, chair stands, using weights or a household item such as a can of beans. Household chores such as carrying shopping, mowing the lawn or gardening are also good strength-building exercises.

What will it do for me?

Strength training maintains bone health and improves muscle strength and your ability to do more activities during the day.

Improve balance

How much:	At least three days a week.
How hard:	Try 2–3 balance exercises and repeat each exercise 10–15 times.
How long:	Hold each balance for 10–30 seconds.
What type:	Try yoga, Tai Chi or home balance exercises. Always exercise safely when doing balance exercises. If you are at high risk of falling, do seated balance exercises or use a sturdy chair or wall for support, then progress to balance exercises with movement when confident.

What will it do for me?

Practicing balance exercises helps to train your body to react more quickly to a loss of balance and can help reduce the risk of falls, fractures and injuries.



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Sedentary living

Reduce the amount of time being sedentary. Move more and break up sedentary time. Sedentary behavior is defined as time spent sitting or lying with low energy expenditure, while awake in the context of occupational, educational, home and community settings, and travel. Higher amounts of sedentary behavior can increase the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

Replace sedentary behavior with more physical activity of any intensity (including light intensity). It is possible to avoid sedentary behaviour and be physically active while sitting or lying, through, for example, upper body led activities, inclusive and/or wheelchair-specific sport and activities. Try seated stretches for those with limited mobility; using active forms of transport; standing while working (within your abilities and environment), and other accessible active options to replace sedentary time.

Your exercise, your way!

Choose activities that are easy to start with, and that you enjoy. Always exercise within your abilities. If mobility is difficult, adapted cycling, swimming and chair-based exercises may be better alternatives. Exercise with friends and family or join a group class to improve your motivation levels and engage in social activities. Try exercising both indoors and outdoors and see which you prefer! Most importantly: **some physical activity is better than none.**

Exercise safety

Plan your workout to avoid factors that may trigger a seizure. With the right support and the relevant safety precautions, most exercises are possible. Avoid exercises such as boxing, swimming, football and high altitude activities such as rock climbing, mountain climbing, scuba diving, parachuting. If rock climbing, horseback riding or board diving, make sure you are closely supervised to avoid risk of injury or seizure activity. Wear protective gear associated with your activity (i.e. a helmet when biking or roller skating, etc.)

Wear or carry something that identifies your epilepsy and first aid protocol. You may need to complete a medical form to take part in some activities so the organizer can do a risk assessment and, if necessary, make any safety adjustments.

Medicines may affect your response to exercise, so choose an exercise plan that suits your particular clinical symptoms and trigger factors.

Don't over-exert yourself and make sure that if you are exercising in a group that people are aware of your condition and know what to do if you have a seizure.

If exercising alone, take adequate safety precautions and ensure that your environment is safe and that you can contact help should a problem arise.

Start with shorter sessions (e.g. 10–15 minutes) and slowly build up to the recommended level.

Aim to get slightly out of breath, but exercise sensibly and stop the activity if you feel unwell.

Always wear comfortable clothing and shoes that give good support. Take frequent breaks if necessary, and drink water before, during and after exercise.

Choose environments that you can access freely and safely. Please ask your healthcare provider or local leisure organizations for advice on the best option for you.

Resources

The Canadian Epilepsy provide resources for individuals living with epilepsy. <https://www.canadianepilepsyalliance.org/about-epilepsy/living-with-epilepsy/>



Scan for more physical activity resources!

