Sex, men and epilepsy

Many men with epilepsy have normal sex lives and father healthy children. But epilepsy can sometimes cause problems with sex and fertility. This information is for those men with epilepsy who may have problems.

Will having epilepsy affect my sex life?

Any man might have problems with sex from time to time, but problems are more common in men with epilepsy than men without epilepsy. The most common problems for men with epilepsy are having little or no interest in sex, and having problems with getting or keeping an erection.

How epilepsy can affect sex life

There are a number of possible reasons why, as a man with epilepsy, you’re more likely to have problems with sex. Possible reasons include:

- Epilepsy medicines
- The effect of epilepsy itself
- Worry about seizures
- Depression and anxiety

Epilepsy medicines

Some epilepsy medicines list sexual problems as a possible side-effect. These medicines are gabapentin, pregabalin, topiramate, clobazam and clonazepam.

Some other medicines don’t list sexual problems as a side-effect. But they can reduce the level of testosterone in your body. This could affect your interest in or ability to have sex. [See box: Testosterone] The medicines that can cause you to have low testosterone levels include phenobarbital, phenytoin, carbamazepine and primidone. There’s also some

2 As above
7 Clonazepam Rosemont 0.5mg/5ml Oral Solution - Summary of Product Characteristics (SmPC) - (eMC) [WWW Document]. n.d. URL https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/6021/smpc (accessed 21.9.18).
evidence that oxcarbazepine, when taken at doses higher than 900mg per day, can have this effect.

Many men take these epilepsy medicines, but only some will have sexual problems. If you think your epilepsy medicine might be having an effect on your sex life talk to your GP, epilepsy specialist nurse or epilepsy specialist.

**The effect of epilepsy itself**

Seizures, especially those that start in a part of the brain called the temporal lobe, can affect levels of sex hormones in the body. Studies suggest that people with temporal lobe epilepsy are more likely to have low sex drive.

**Worry about seizures**

Some men worry that they’ll have a seizure during sex. Having sex is very unlikely to trigger seizures, and most men with epilepsy don’t have seizures during sex. But if this is something that you’re worried about, the worry could have an effect on your sex life.

**Depression and anxiety**

People with epilepsy are more likely to be affected by depression and anxiety. If you’re feeling depressed or anxious, this could cause you to have less interest in sex.

**Testosterone**

Your body produces the hormone testosterone. Testosterone is responsible for many things that affect your sex life. These include your interest in having sex, your ability to have sex and your fertility. If you have low testosterone levels, this may cause you to have problems with your sex life.

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Treating sexual problems

If you have any worries about your sex drive, or your ability to have sex, you are not alone. It’s really worth talking to your GP. They will look for ways to help you. For most men with sexual problems, a treatment can be found.

If you and your doctor think your sexual problems may have an emotional cause, your doctor may recommend sex therapy, psychotherapy or relationship counselling.

If it looks like there’s a physical cause for your sexual problems, your GP may suggest lifestyle changes or treatments to help.

If your GP thinks your sexual problems might be connected to your epilepsy or epilepsy medicines, they will usually refer you to an epilepsy specialist. Your epilepsy specialist might suggest making changes to your treatment to see if this helps.

The NHS website has information about treatment for male sexual problems.

Fertility (fathering a baby)

Some research suggests that men with epilepsy may not be as fertile as men who don’t have epilepsy. This can make it more difficult to father a baby.

Ways in which epilepsy may affect your fertility

You may be taking an epilepsy medicine that can reduce the amount of sperm you produce or affect the quality of it. Carbamazepine, phenytoin and sodium valproate may all have this effect. There’s a small amount of evidence that levetiracetam may also affect the number and quality of sperm you produce.

Your epilepsy or epilepsy medicines may have caused you to have lower testosterone levels than usual [see box: Testosterone]. This could make you less fertile.

Treating fertility problems

If you’re trying for a baby and your partner is taking a long time to get pregnant, speak to your family doctor. They can check for common causes of fertility problems in you and your partner. They can also suggest treatments that may help.

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If your family doctor thinks that your epilepsy or epilepsy medicines are a possible cause, they’ll usually refer you to an epilepsy specialist. The specialist may make changes to your epilepsy medicine, to see if that helps.

**Where to get further help**

**Sexual Advice Association**  
Tel: 020 7486 7262  
Website: sexualadviceassociation.co.uk  
Aims to help improve the sexual health and wellbeing of men and women. Their website has information on many different aspects of sexual problems.

**Institute of Psychosexual Medicine (IPM)**  
Website: ipm.org.uk  
Provides a list of IPM trained specialists, some working privately and some on the NHS.

**About this information**  
This information is written by Epilepsy Action’s advice and information team, with guidance and input from people living with epilepsy, and medical experts. If you would like to know where our information is from, or there is anything you would like to say about the information, please contact us at epilepsy.org.uk/feedback

Epilepsy Action makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of information but cannot be held liable for any actions taken based on this information.

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**Your support**

We hope you have found this information helpful. As a charity, we rely on donations to provide our advice and information. If you would like to make a donation, here are some ways you can do this.

- Visit [www.epilepsy.org.uk/donate](http://www.epilepsy.org.uk/donate)
- Text **ACT NOW** to **70700** (This will cost you £5 plus your usual cost of sending a text. Epilepsy Action will receive £5.)
- Send a cheque payable to Epilepsy Action to the address below.

Did you know you can also become a member of Epilepsy Action from as little as £1 a month? To find out more, visit epilepsy.org.uk/join or call 0113 210 8800.