Developing epilepsy in later life

Introduction
This information is for you if you have been told that you have epilepsy. It might be a shock for you as an older person. In fact, around one in every four people who are told they have epilepsy is over the age of 65, so you are not alone.

Safety
It can take time to come to terms with having epilepsy. You might worry about having more seizures, and hurting yourself. Or that you will lose your independence because of your seizures. It is true you need to consider making some lifestyle changes, but they needn’t interfere with your quality of life. There are many things you will still be able to do, with a few safety precautions. Here are some suggestions:

- If you are having a bath or shower, consider having someone with you, or just outside the door, checking that you are safe
- If you have free-standing heaters, try to place them where they are least likely to be knocked over during a seizure
- Try to avoid placing your bed against a wall or next to a radiator. This can prevent you knocking your limbs on the wall, or burning yourself on the radiator during a tonic-clonic seizure

Driving – the law
If you have a driving licence, you should stop driving and inform your driving agency. If you live in England, Scotland or Wales, this is the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). If you live in Northern Ireland, it’s the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA). You shouldn’t drive until your driving agency says you can. You may be able to get a free or half price pass for the bus, and a Disabled Person’s Railcard because you have lost your driving licence. Contact Epilepsy Action for more information.

Work
Depending on the type of work you do, you may need to be extra careful for a while. Talk to your manager, to make sure you are as safe as possible at work and are not breaching any health and safety regulations.

Treating epilepsy
The main treatment for epilepsy is epilepsy medicine. Sometimes it is called anti-epileptic drugs or AEDs for short. The medicine doesn’t cure epilepsy, but helps stop or lower the number of seizures you have. Around four in every 10 people with epilepsy find their seizures stop with the first epilepsy medicine they try.

There are many different medicines for epilepsy. Your epilepsy specialist will recommend the best one for you. They should tell you how it works and what the possible side-effects are. They will also need to know if you take any medicine for other conditions, as they can affect how well your epilepsy medicines work or make seizures more likely.

It’s usual to start epilepsy medicine at a low dose and increase it step-by-step, until it’s at a dose that’s going to work best for you.
Bone health
Older people are more vulnerable to broken bones than younger people. And some studies suggest that this also applies to people who take epilepsy medicines for a long time. Epilepsy Action has a fact sheet called Bone health and epilepsy, which looks at some of these studies. It gives tips to protect your bones, and tells you where to get more information.

Memory
Finding it hard to remember things seems to be a common problem for people with epilepsy. Epileptic seizures can affect memory. And some epilepsy medicine can affect memory. Epilepsy Action has information on things you can do to help with memory problems.

How we can help
You might want to talk to other people with epilepsy. Epilepsy Action has a network of branches, coffee and chat groups and volunteers throughout the UK. These provide local support to people with epilepsy, their family and friends and carers.

You may be interested in our online community, forum4e: forum4e.com. This is for people with epilepsy and carers of people with epilepsy. You will be able to talk to others in a similar situation on forum4e.

If you have any further questions about anything to do with epilepsy, contact an adviser on the Epilepsy Helpline: 0808 800 5050 or email helpline@epilepsy.org.uk You can also contact your family doctor, epilepsy specialist, or epilepsy specialist nurse.

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

Our thanks
Epilepsy Action would like to thank Dr Aza Abdulla, Consultant Physician, Princess Royal University Hospital, Bromley Hospitals NHS Trust, London for his contribution to this information. Dr Abdulla has declared no conflict of interest.

Epilepsy Helpline
Freephone 0808 800 5050, text 0753 741 0044, email helpline@epilepsy.org.uk, tweet @epilepsyadvice, epilepsy.org.uk

Code: G02.01; Last Updated: January 2014; Due for Review: January 2017

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