



Information on Alcohol and Drugs

Alcohol consumption has long been recognized as a risk factor for seizures. It can result in first-time seizures in people who are not diagnosed with epilepsy and in people with epilepsy it can result in more frequent or severe seizures. There is a particular risk in cases of chronic alcoholism and alcohol abuse in which large amounts of alcohol are consumed on a regular basis.

Alcohol can make a person more susceptible to seizures by lowering his or her “threshold” for seizures. This is most likely to occur during alcohol withdrawal, although it also appears that the risk of seizures increases as the amount of alcohol consumed increases.

People with epilepsy who do not abuse alcohol are often concerned about the effects of an occasional social drink on seizure control and the interactions certain amounts of alcohol may have with antiepileptic medications (AEDs). Alcohol can react negatively with some AEDs, rendering them less effective, or producing harmful side effects. Alcohol consumption can also cause a person to neglect taking needed medication, leaving them more vulnerable to seizures. The amount a person can safely consume without experiencing serious side effects will vary greatly from one person to another. People with epilepsy should consult their physician about their individual alcohol consumption, and should understand their own limits.

Use of illegal drugs carry their own risks for any person, but they may have particular dangers for a person with epilepsy. Drugs such as cocaine, PCP, speed, and others have been known to cause seizures. Drugs that may seem harmless can contain additives or impurities that make them dangerous. They can also react dangerously with medications or alcohol. Drug and alcohol abuse result in an increased risk of death among people with epilepsy and the general population alike, and should be avoided at all costs. Drug and alcohol use may reflect stress in life or an inability to cope with challenges with relations, work, or pain. Substance abuse or a person heading towards substance dependency should immediately seek help from a professional.

References

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Porter, Roger J., Richard H. Mattson, Joyce A. Cramer, and Ivan Diamond, eds. *Alcohol and Seizures*. Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company, 1990.

Community Resources

Alcohol and Drug Information and Referral Services: 1-800-663-1441, or 604-660-9382

Vancouver Coastal Health Authority Addiction Services: <http://www.vch.ca/addictions>

Fraser Health Authority Addiction Services:

<http://www.fraserhealth.ca/services/mentalhealthandaddictions/addictionservices>

This information sheet was adapted on February 12, 2008 with permission of the Epilepsy Foundation

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