

Fact Sheet 19

Epilepsy and Motherhood

A mum with epilepsy has to work doubly hard in child-rearing, simply because of the effects of her condition and because of the medication she likely needs to take. She is often tired, fatigued, has memory issues or experiences confusion (if she is continuing to have seizures), and so being a new mum only compounds those feelings because looking after a baby is tiring in itself.

A mum with epilepsy has to make sure that both she and her baby/toddler are safe at all times. Careful thought and management strategies are needed so that a mum can enjoy the thrill of being a parent and at the same time have confidence in her ability in being a good one.

Here are a few suggestions that could help a new mother who has epilepsy care for her baby.

Take care of yourself

1. Continue to take your medication as directed by your epilepsy specialist. If you have any concerns about your medication always seek professional help.
2. Rest as much as possible. It is tiring having a baby, or running around after a toddler. You may also be working outside the home. Fatigue is a common seizure trigger.
3. Get enough sleep so that you can cope with the demands of being a mother. If you are breast feeding, that is tiring, and it may be necessary to express your milk so that your partner, or family/whanau, can feed your baby during the night. Sleep deprivation is a common seizure trigger.
4. Gladly accept help with chores, meal preparation, shopping etc. Prioritise what is important in your life.
5. Continue to record your seizures in your seizure diary. This information will help your epilepsy specialist in modifying or changing a care/medication plan for you. Always seek professional help with your concerns.
6. Keep yourself safe. Remember to say to yourself, "If I have a seizure now, what is going to happen?" Develop an epilepsy care plan so that others know how to help you in the event of a seizure.

7. Make your home safe. See: Fact Sheet 9 - Safety in the home (<http://ewct.org.nz/safety-in-the-home/>).
8. Talk to your community social services (such as a midwife) to receive the best support for you and your family.
9. Have a copy of “Ben’s Buddies” (EWCT’s children’s epilepsy book) so that you can talk freely to your children about your epilepsy as they grow up.
10. Enjoy your baby!

Take care of your baby. Think safety!

A. Bathing your baby

- It would be wise to leave bathing your baby until someone is around to help you. Having a seizure whilst bathing your baby could possibly result in your baby drowning.

B. Changing and dressing your baby

- Change and dress your baby on the floor to avoid the baby falling off a changing table just in case you have a seizure

C. Feeding your baby

- Sit in a safe place to breast or bottle feed your baby, preferably on the floor, to avoid your baby from falling from any height and becoming hurt.
- Memory can be an issue if you are taking medications, or having seizures. Keep notes of your baby’s feeding times, what he/she has eaten, and any feeding issues.
- Contact your Plunket nurse for guidance regarding feeding tips, routines, and ages and stages denoting when to introduce solid foods to your baby.

D. Feeding your toddler

- Place your toddler in a high-chair that is attached to the kitchen-table rather than using a free-standing high-chair just in case you have a seizure and cause the high-chair to fall over.
- Strap your toddler into the high-chair.
- Have a supply of ready-made meals available for when you cannot cook meals. Making your own food for your toddler and freezing it into ice-cube trays is useful.

E. Keeping your baby / toddler safe- safety tips

- It is advisable to use a small pram, or car seat, to transport your baby around inside the home instead of carrying him/her. This will prevent your baby from injury should you have a seizure and drop him/her.
- If you need time to recover after a seizure, place your baby/toddler in the same room as you, in a playpen if necessary, and set an alarm to wake you, so that you can check on your baby/toddler.
It would be preferable for someone to mind your baby/toddler whilst you recover.
- Make sure that your home is “child and seizure safe”. See: Fact Sheet 9 - Safety in the home (<http://ewct.org.nz/safety-in-the-home/>)
- Do not cook whilst carrying your baby or toddler. See: Fact Sheet 14 - Safe cooking epilepsy (<http://ewct.org.nz/safe-cooking-strategies-people-epilepsy/>)
- Shut doors and gates (but do not lock them) to prevent your toddler from straying or running away should you have a seizure. If you lock your doors and gates, emergency services may not be able to help you quickly in the event of a crisis or emergency.
- Share an epilepsy action plan with a trusted neighbor, which could include the care of your baby/toddler in the event of you having a seizure. Your epilepsy advisor can help you design an epilepsy action plan suitable for you and your circumstances.
- Once your toddler is old enough to understand how to help you, then give him/her some simple instructions such as knowing how to seek help from your neighbour. As your child gets older involve him/her more in your care, such as learning how to phone for emergency services <http://ewct.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/17.How-to-dial-111-for-an-ambulance.pdf> or learning how to put you in a recovery position <http://ewct.org.nz/what-to-do-if-someone-is-having-a-convulsive-seizure/>
Get a copy of “Ben’s Buddies”, which is a child-friendly resource from your EWCT advisor.
- Make sure that your medications are out of reach of your toddler.
- Do not drive if you have been stood down by your neurologist or GP. See Fact sheet 11 - Driving and epilepsy (<http://ewct.org.nz/driving-and-epilepsy/>) for more information.

Disclaimer: this fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult your doctor or other health professional for advice regarding your epilepsy.