

SAFETY RULES FOR THE HOME

PREFACE:

Rebecca Johnson's offer to volunteer for the Epilepsy Foundation of Virginia, EFVA) came as a pleasant surprise. Rebecca has many qualifications that benefit EFVA. She has taught Spanish, French and English as a second language for 20 years. Her teaching activities ranged from gifted six-year olds to undergraduate university students. She presently tutors in the Fredericksburg area. Because of her background, she was eminently qualified to produce accessible materials for persons with epilepsy. Following our request, Ms. Johnson provided EFVA with information, which provides advice for people on how to enhance and maintain their safety in the home and take precautions. She also persuaded a friend to provide illustrations. Matthew Mays updated this document in 2013. Please join me in thanking Rebecca Johnson and Matthew Mays for these excellent efforts, Suzanne Bischoff, Executive Director, Epilepsy Foundation of Virginia.

INTRODUCTION:

Many individuals with seizures feel unsafe because of those seizures. They fear burns or injuries from falling. The kind and the frequency of the seizures determine the danger of injuries. Some precautions may help people reduce the risk of seizures in the home.

For more information about Home Safety, go to
http://www.epilepsy.com/epilepsy/safety_home

Some people may have to make several changes in their lives in order to enjoy more safety at home. For others, fewer changes may be needed. This depends upon the types of seizures one has, one's daily activity, and how much money one can spend. First, is the list of SAFETY RULES. Following that is the WHERE TO FIND IT section, with locations of household goods, materials, and labor needed to carry out some of the rules.

The SAFETY RULES and WHERE TO FIND IT are cross-referenced. Pick a rule. Go to the section in WHERE TO FIND IT, stated after the rule. This will indicate where you can find what you need to carry out that rule. Pick and choose from the rules and materials which you need. Of course, many important rules may be carried out without purchasing anything.

You may want to make a time schedule for completion of each rule you choose.

PERSONAL SAFETY

1. Wear a well-fitting helmet in the kitchen, bathroom, and any other areas with hard floors and sharp edges. Wear it constantly at home to protect against head and facial injuries, if your seizures are frequent or sudden and if you fall during those seizures. (See A. Helmets.) For information on buying a helmet, go to
http://www.epilepsy.com/epilepsy/safety_helmet

2. Know the symptoms of your seizures and proper first aid. Make sure your family and friends do, too. Have seizure drills with young children and teach them how to call for help. Your local Epilepsy Support Network, the EFVA or the Epilepsy Foundation of America can supply first aid information. (See B. First Aid Information.) For advice on

seizure first aid, go to http://www.cdc.gov/epilepsy/basics/first_aid.htm

3. Wear a medical identification bracelet or necklace and keep a card in your wallet with contact information, medications and allergies. (See C. Medic Alert.) To get your MedicAlert ID, go to <http://www.medicalert.org/>
4. Identify and avoid things that increase seizure triggers, such as: forgetting to take medications, stress, insufficient sleep, the use of alcohol or illegal drugs, or getting overheated. Get a pillbox at a drugstore or grocery store and try using it with daily dosages to help you remember your medications.
5. Store all medications away from small children.
6. Carry a small portable phone or beeper in case you have to call for help and cannot get to a regular telephone. (See D. Department and Hardware Stores: Appliances and Electronics.) To see reviews for the best Medical Alert Services, go to <http://medical-alert-systems-review.toptenreviews.com/>
7. If you have an aura (warning) before a seizure, lie down on your side on a carpeted or other soft surface. For more info on auras, go to <https://www.epilepsy.com/epilepsy/auras>

HOUSEHOLD Falls

8. Floors should be carpeted with padding underneath. (See G. Carpet and Floor Covering Stores.)
9. Buy chairs with covered armrests. Seek out rounded corners on new tables and TV stands. (See F. Furniture, D. Department and Hardware Stores: Furniture, and I. Experts: Wholesalers.)
10. If you are creative, cover existing table tops and chair arms with quilted fabric, felt, decorator pillows or padded vinyl and a few tacks or staples. (See H. Fabric Stores). Corner guards can be purchased from a wholesale catalog and easily applied. (See I. Experts: Wholesalers.)
11. Keep toys and other clutter off the floor to prevent tripping.
12. Try to avoid climbing stairs or ladders, especially when alone. Keep the things you use most on low shelves.
13. If you tend to wander during a seizure, make sure outside doors are securely locked. Consider placing an alarm on an outside door that will alert others in the house if you try to open the door during a seizure. (See I. Experts: Electronics, and Technologists and Contractors).
14. Lock all inside doors which lead to a descending stairway, or install or build a sturdy safety gate of sufficient height in front of an open stairway. (See I. Experts: Carpentry, Technologists, and Contractors.)

Burns

15. Avoid using space heaters that easily tip over. (See D. Department and Hardware Stores: Large Appliances.)
16. Place non-flammable barriers in front of heaters and hot radiators, while still allowing them space to give off heat. Have bumper guards or deflectors installed on heating units by a contractor. If you are in for remodeling, perhaps you would like to try heating units mounted into the wall as panels, rather than along the floor, where people tend to fall. (See I. Experts: Heating, Technologists, and Contractors.)
17. Lower temperature on water heater or purchase scald-proof faucets. (See I. Experts: Plumbing.)
18. Avoid smoking or lighting a fire when you are by yourself.
19. Don't carry hot objects, such as fireplace ashes or lighted candles, through the house.
20. Use curling irons or clothing irons with an automatic shut off switch. It's best to have someone nearby, when operating any appliance that gets hot. (See D. Department and Hardware: Appliances and Electronics.) You can avoid using clothing irons by buying permanent press clothes or sending your clothes to the cleaners.
21. Put an immovable shield around fireplace or wood stove. (See F. Furniture Stores and I. Experts: Technologists and Wholesalers.)
22. Beverages should be lukewarm, rather than hot.
23. Use a "commuter mug" (with a lid that has a hole or spout to drink from) for hot liquids. (See D. Department and Hardware: Housewares and E. Grocery Stores.)

Cuts

24. Make sure any motor-driven equipment, such as a lawn mower, has a kill-switch that will stop the machine if your hand releases normal pressure. More simply, buy a hand-push lawn mower. (See D. Department and Hardware Stores: Lawn and Garden Power Tools.)
25. Take a careful look at the power tools in your home workshop--do they have an automatic shut off? Could you be hurt if you had a seizure while using them? Be especially careful of circular saws, drills, and sewing machines. (See D. Department and Hardware Stores: Lawn and Garden, Power Tools.)
26. Don't use breakable materials, such as glass tabletops, lampshades, curio cabinets, or mirrors. Use objects with shatterproof glass. (See D. Department and Hardware Stores: Furniture, and F. Furniture.)

BATHROOM SAFETY

Falls

27. Leave bathroom doors unlocked.

- 28. Singing in the shower or tub will reassure others that you're doing fine. You may need to have someone nearby when you take a bath or shower.
- 29. Routinely check to see that the bathroom drains, especially shower or tub, are clear. If the drain needs to be cleared, use a conventional drain product. If that does not work, call a plumber. (See I. Experts: Plumbing.)
- 30. Sponge bath, instead of tub, when alone.
- 31. Get padded or "soft" flooring for kitchen and bathroom. (See G. Carpet and Floor Covering Stores and I. Experts: Technologists and Wholesalers.)
- 32. Place "soft" grab bars or rails around the tub. (See I. Experts: "Softer House", Plumbing, Contractors, and Barrier-Free Supply).
- 33. Hang the bathroom doors and shower doors so that they open outward, instead of inward. If someone has a seizure and falls against a closed door, the door can still be opened from the other side. Any reputable carpenter should be able to re-hang doors. (See I. Experts: Carpentry or Contractors.)
- 34. If you fall frequently during seizures, use a shower or tub seat with a safety strap. Consider using a hand-held shower nozzle while seated in the tub or shower. A do-it-yourselfer can install a hand-held shower nozzle, according to package directions or you can call a plumber. (See I. Experts: Plumber and Barrier-Free Supply.)
- 35. If you fall frequently during seizures, the experts offer a "soft" bathtub for your protection. (See I. Experts: Technologists and Contractors.)
- 36. Put non-skid strips in the tub to avoid slippage. (See E. Grocery Stores.)

Asphyxiation and Electrocutation

- 37. Keep the bathroom well ventilated, so that it does not get too hot.
- 38. Bathe in shallow water.
- 39. Use an electric razor to avoid cuts. (See D. Department and Hardware Stores: Appliances and Electronics).
- 40. When you use electric appliances (razor, hairdryer, etc.) in the bathroom, keep water out of the sink and tub and the toilet seat down to avoid electrocution.
- 41. Put vanity area outside of bathroom. It keeps you in view of other family members when you do not need privacy. It makes the bathroom less busy, too. (See I. Experts: Technologists and Contractors, and J. Kits.)

KITCHEN SAFETY

Falls

- 42. Buy corner covers for sharp walls and cabinet corners. (See I. Experts:

Contractors, and Wholesalers.) Or you can pad them yourself, with vinyl, as with the tabletops. (See H. Fabric Stores.)

43. You may want to look into the new countertops and cabinets with padded, rounded corners (See I. Experts: "Softer House", Technicians, Contractors, and Wholesalers.)

44. Prepare recipes with single activities lumped together, to avoid trips back and forth. For example, do all chopping at once. The less you walk around, the less likely you are to fall from a standing position. When possible, sit in a chair. This also relieves stress on your back and legs.

Cuts

45. Use a serving cart with wheels to transport hot foods, dishes, glasses, etc. (See D. Department and Hardware Stores: Furniture, and F. Furniture Stores.)

46. Keep counters clear, so that things can be slid across countertops, rather than carrying them.

47. Plan meal preparations ahead to avoid rushing.

48. Use plastic or paper dishes and left-over containers. (See D. Department and Hardware Stores: Housewares, and E. Grocery Stores.)

49. Buy food in plastic, not glass, containers. (See E. Grocery Stores.)

50. Avoid using electric knives for carving.

51. Store sharp objects together to avoid cuts when reaching in drawers.

52. Buy ready-grated cheese and cut vegetables, along with frozen or canned vegetables, to avoid chopping. (See E. Grocery Stores.)

53. When possible, use gadgets to help you, such as a vegetable chopper or food processor, rather than knives. (See D. Department and Hardware Stores: Appliances and Electronics, and Housewares. See E. Grocery Stores for food chopper.)

Burns

54. Wear rubber gloves when using hot water to wash glassware or when loading dishwasher. (See D. Department and Hardware Stores: Housewares, and E. Grocery Stores.)

55. Use a microwave oven to avoid conventional heating elements or flame. (See D. Department and Hardware Stores: Appliances and Electronics, and F. Furniture Stores.)

56. Use an automatic coffee maker or heat water by the cup in the microwave, instead of boiling a kettle.
(See D. Department and Hardware Stores: Appliances and Electronics.)

57. Use microwaveable dishes--they stay relatively cool. (See D. Department and Hardware Stores: Housewares.)

- 58. Have a smooth-surface cook top installed in the kitchen. They prevent clothes from catching fire in an open flame. They also allow for sliding pots on and off burners, rather than lifting. (See F. Furniture Stores, D. Department and Hardware Stores: Large Appliances, and I. Experts: Technologists and Contractors.)
- 59. If a conventional range is used, use back burners and long, mitt-style pot holders. (See D. Department and Hardware Stores: Housewares, and E. Grocery Stores.)
- 60. Serve food from where it is cooked directly onto plates to avoid carrying hot pans.
- 61. Keep electrical appliances far from the sink or source of water.

AT MEALTIME

- 62. Know and teach family members first-aid procedures for choking. For instruction, contact the American Red Cross, listed in the white pages of your telephone directory. For information on seizure first aid, go to http://www.cdc.gov/epilepsy/basics/first_aid.htm
- 63. Use chairs with armrests to help prevent falling. (See D. Department and Hardware Stores: Furniture, F. Furniture Stores, and I. Experts: Wholesalers.)
- 64. Sit upright while eating.

PARENTING SAFETY

- 65. You will want to child-proof your house as other parents do. For advice to enhance safety around the house, to go http://www.babycenter.com/0_childproofing-around-the-house_460.bc
- 66. Dress, change and sponge bathe the baby on the floor, using a portable changing pad. (See D. Department and Hardware Stores: Infantware.)
- 67. Feeding the baby while the child is seated in a stroller or infant seat may work for you. Toddler seats and small feeding tables can be used as a child grows. (See D. Department and Hardware Stores: Infantware, and F. Furniture Stores.)
- 68. If you are nursing a baby or bottle-feeding, sit on the floor or bed with your back supported. This way the baby will be protected from falling very far if you should lose consciousness.
- 69. Move the baby around in a stroller or small crib that can be wheeled easily from one room to another. (See D. Department and Hardware Stores: Infantware.)
- 70. Keep a young baby in a playpen as much as possible when you are occupied. Keep a toddler in a large enclosure or indoor play yard. Use a safety gate to create the enclosure, if needed. (See D. Department and Hardware Stores: Infantware.)
- 71. Keep your epilepsy medicine, as well as all medication, out of the reach of all children.

72. When out shopping or walking, connect your hands to your child's hands with a child safety strap, or have the child wear a safety harness so that he/she can't wander away if you have a seizure that affects your awareness. (See D. Department and Hardware Stores: Infantware.)

73. As your child grows, explain your seizures in words he/she can understand, and won't frighten him/her. The Epilepsy Foundation of America and the Epilepsy Foundation of Virginia have materials which explain seizures for children. (See B: First Aid Information.) For more advice on how to help you child understand, go to <http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org/livingwiththeepilepsy/educators/socialissues/helping-children-understand.cfm>

74. Teach your toddler how to call a neighbor, relative, or friend if you have a major seizure. Put the phone numbers in big bright colors near the phone. Teach your child how to call 911 and give your home address.

75. Pre-program your phone to automatically contact the local rescue squad (or other source of help), or page a family member or friend. Then teach everyone in your family how to use it.

CHILDREN'S SAFETY

76. A monitor in the child's bedroom may alert you to the sound of a typical seizure. This is called a "baby monitor". (See D. Department and Hardware Stores: Infantware, Furniture Stores, and I. Experts: Technologists and Contractors.)

77. Avoid top bunks. A lower bunk, a regular bed, a futon or even a mattress on the floor is a safer place to sleep for a child with seizures. (See F. Furniture Stores.)

78. Choking is a risk for any child, especially if the child has frequent seizures and other disabilities. Children sometimes retain food in their mouths and it's a good idea to check if this is a problem. **Roll the person to their side to prevent choking.** Sometimes during a seizure a person may throw up or drool a lot. That way, anything in the mouth will come out instead of blocking off the throat and airway.

79. Put a list of first aid steps on the refrigerator or some other place that is easy to find. Write down the phone number where you or a relative can be reached. Include the doctor's number and the one for the emergency squad on the same sheet.

80. If your child is going to sleep at a friend's or relative's house overnight, make sure a copy of the first aid list goes with him/her, and that an adult in the house knows what to expect and how to administer proper seizure first aid.

81. If your child has an episode of status epilepticus (seizures that won't stop, or a series of seizures), check with the doctor on what to do if he/she has another one. Make sure everyone in the family knows what to do.

82. Purchase a Medic Alert bracelet, stating that your child has epilepsy along with a contact person. To get your MedicAlert ID, go to <http://www.medicalert.org/>

83. Do not to make your child's seizures a reason not to do things the family would otherwise do, or fail to discipline your child on that account.

84. Encourage your child to be active and to have as much social contact with other children as possible.