

ABOUT EPILEPSY AND LEARNING



Epilepsy is a medical condition that affects the brain and causes seizures. Seizures occur due to a disruption to electrical activity in the brain, which may lead to a change in a person's movement, behaviour, level of awareness or feelings.

Having epilepsy does not automatically mean having learning difficulties, but some learners with epilepsy report difficulties with memory, concentration and fatigue, which all has an impact on learning.

Understanding epilepsy and learning

Epilepsy is characterised by recurrent seizures. A seizure is a temporary disruption of the chemical activity in the brain and can present in many ways. These may involve a part of the body (partial) or the entire body (generalised) and may include changes to sensation, awareness, behaviour or movement.

It is important to note that not all seizures involve convulsions and not all seizures are diagnosed as epilepsy (Epilepsy Action Australia, 2020).

Epilepsy and mental health

Research shows that those living with a chronic health condition such as epilepsy are at a much higher risk of experiencing anxiety and depression, as many as 1 in 2 people (Epilepsy Action Australia 2022).

It is also important to be aware of the link between medication for epilepsy and the potential effects it might have on the learner. Certain kinds of anti-epilepsy medication are known to cause mood changes, interrupted sleep patterns, fatigue, lack of attention or agitation (Epsy Health 2022).

Impact of epilepsy on learning

It is important to note that most learners with epilepsy have the same range of intelligence and abilities as other learners. However, in a learning environment, a learner with epilepsy may experience:

- fatigue
- difficulty with attention, concentration and memory
- slowed cognitive processing (thinking skills)
- difficulties with executive functions leading to poor organisational and problem-solving skills or being unable to start or stay on task
- low self-esteem, frustration, anxiety, depression and poor motivation
- co-occurrence with an additional disability such as cerebral palsy, ADHD and autism.



**Government
of South Australia**

Department for Education

EPILEPSY AND LEARNING ADJUSTMENTS



TRAINING, SEIZURE MANAGEMENT AND MEDICATION

Staff must be trained to support learners who are diagnosed with seizures or epilepsy. Training and support must be individualised to each learner and the specific requirements documented in their care plan and support agreements.

Learners must have a seizure management plan completed by a treating health professional, or use the standard seizure first aid procedures and flow chart until a management plan has been supplied.

If intranasal midazolam (INM) is part of the learner's management plan, this will need to be documented by a treating health professional in an Emergency Management Medication Plan. Since INM is a scheduled medication, it also requires specific management such as training of staff in the administration of INM. It also requires an authorisation to administer a controlled medicine form and the use of a controlled and restricted medicines register.

EXAMPLES OF ADJUSTMENTS



General adjustments

- Know your learner and be aware of their triggers and early warning signs that a seizure is about to occur.
- Encourage signals (where possible) so learners can alert teachers and peers to discomfort.
- Identify and take steps to reduce common triggers in the school environment.
- After a seizure, the learner may need a little extra time before they begin learning again.
- The speech and language of the learner may be delayed following a seizure. Notify families or carers of any noticeable changes.



Environmental adjustments

- Reduce background noises and distractions to help the learner maintain attention.
- Make sure there's a route to a safe space the learner can move to if they feel a seizure is about to occur.
- Set up an alternate, simple, low stimulus area that allows the learner to still feel included but with reduced stimulus.
- Provide access to headphones, white noise, low light and soft fall if necessary.



Social and emotional wellbeing adjustments

- Regularly check in with the learner to determine how they are feeling.
- Provide opportunities for the learner to connect with their peers and support social interaction.
- Provide opportunities for exercise and physical breaks – a proven way to reduce stress and regulate emotions.
- Work with key family members or carers to determine if building peer awareness is necessary and how this can be achieved in a sensitive manner.