Water Smart® Facts

Epilepsy and Water Safety

A Seizure in the Water

When an individual has a seizure in the pool, the lifeguard’s two concerns are that the person will stop breathing & that s/he will be physically hurt. Although any seizure experienced in or near water could be dangerous or even fatal, it is the tonic clonic (formerly called grand mal) seizure that causes the most concern. For this reason a short description of what could occur if a swimmer experiences a tonic clonic seizure follows:

While in the tonic (rigid) phase the muscles contract, causing the body to lose its buoyancy and sink. When the clonic phase begins, the person’s muscles contract & relax allowing the lungs to fill with water, causing the person to drown. This can occur in a few seconds & in just a few inches of water—whether a pool, lake, or bath.

If You Have Epilepsy

- SWIM WITH A BUDDY—in an area supervised by a Lifesaving Society trained lifeguard.
- CHOOSE IT. USE IT. WEAR A LIFEJACKET—it can only help if you have it on.
- KEEP WATCH WITHIN ARMS REACH—if you’re not within arms reach of your child, you’ve gone too far. Never leave children unsupervised around water!
- ADVISE THE LIFEGUARD OF YOUR EPILEPSY—he or she will be much better prepared to assist if a seizure occurs.
- PACE YOURSELF—to avoid a seizure caused by hyperventilation.
- IF BOATING—wear your lifejacket, don’t go out alone, be aware of weather, drive at a safe speed, and don’t use alcohol—it may trigger a seizure.

Whether in the water or on a boat, most water related incidents are preventable with a little preparation and common sense.

Play safe and BE WATER SMART!

For More Information:
The Lifesaving Society AB/NWT
www.lifesaving.org
The Epilepsy Association of Calgary
www.epilepsycalgary.com
Edmonton Epilepsy Association
www.edmontonepilepsy.org
Or Contact
Your physician or healthcare provider
Physical activity is very good for most people and the person who has epilepsy is no exception. In fact, it has been found that in most cases physical activity FAVOURABLY affects the epilepsy. The tension and stress that can trigger seizures may be reduced through physical activity—which includes swimming. To maximize the benefits of swimming and water sports, and minimize the possibility of a preventable incident—BE WATER SMART!

**Prevent a seizure related drowning**

- **RECOGNIZE**—That a seizure can occur in the water and be alert.
- **RESPONSE**—Call out for help
- **RESCUE**—Approach the person while maintaining your own safety
- Turn the person over if they are face-down in the water
- Support the head during the seizure
- Remove the person from the water AFTER the seizure has stopped
- **SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION**—To ensure that no water has been ingested into the lungs.

Don’t let your summer fun become a summer tragedy. Whether in the water or on a boat, most water related incidents are preventable with a little preparation and common sense.

Play safe and BE WATER SMART!

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