

# BBC Radio Shropshire Factsheet

## Epilepsy

Around 440,000 people in the UK have epilepsy. Although in the past prejudice was common, these days, with increased knowledge, attitudes are changing.

With support and the right treatment, someone with epilepsy can expect to lead an active, satisfying and healthy life.

A person with epilepsy is just like anyone else – except that from time to time, a temporary change in their brain chemistry means that they have a seizure. This can be triggered by many things, such as excess alcohol, stress, illness, light patterns, lack of sleep or even particular types of food.

Sometimes the reason for epilepsy is obvious – a severe blow to the head or an infection such as meningitis. Although epilepsy itself is not hereditary, it is possible for a low trigger point or seizure threshold to run in the family. For most people though, the exact cause will never be discovered.

It can be very difficult for a doctor to diagnose epilepsy – there are many types of epilepsy and there is no one certain test, so if you have had a seizure and you go to a doctor have some answers ready for the questions the doctor may ask, such as:

- How did you feel before you had the seizure e.g. hot, cold, hungry, tired etc.
- Did you experience any unusual symptoms beforehand e.g. nausea, dizziness, chest pain? (This is to rule out medical problems that could be confused with epilepsy such as heart problems, migraine, panic attacks or fainting.)
- Had you drunk any alcohol or taken any drugs of any kind?
- Did you have any warning beforehand? If so, what?
- Do you remember anything about the seizure? If not, what happened when you came round?
- Did you fall over and/or injure yourself?
- Were there any symptoms after the attack e.g. numbness or weakness?
- How many seizures have you had?
- Are there any other factors which could suggest epilepsy e.g. head injury, previous seizures, other people in your family with epilepsy?

Not all forms of treatment are effective for all patients. Some people find complementary therapies such as hypnosis, reflexology or aromatherapy effective, but your doctor would advise you not to discontinue conventional treatment. A very small number of people with certain forms of epilepsy can be treated by surgery. In Jim Hawkins' recent programme on BBC Radio Shropshire, David from Dawley spoke of his experience – his son Ryan has had brain surgery for epilepsy. He is happy to talk to parents in a similar position. His number is **07813 360 808**

There is support readily available. Epilepsy Action has branches all over the country. Locally, call Adam and Hayley Freestone on **01743 358238**, or Mike McClay on **01939 210315**.

Much of the information on this sheet is taken from the Epilepsy Action web site – [www.epilepsy.org.uk](http://www.epilepsy.org.uk)  
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There is a wealth of information available on the internet, such as the BBC's [bbc.co.uk/health/epilepsy/](http://bbc.co.uk/health/epilepsy/) Remember, if you don't have a computer at home, all public libraries have computers with internet access – and staff ready to help you use them.

People with epilepsy and their families whose first language is not English will now be able to access epilepsy information and advice over the telephone in their own language, as a result of a new service

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being launched by Epilepsy Action. The number is **0808 800 5050** – it may be helpful for an English speaker to make the initial contact and then an interpreter will call back.