

Having epilepsy does impose some restrictions on certain recreational activities.

All too often, families or medical advisers of people with epilepsy place a heavy blanket of restrictions over all activities that may even remotely lead to an injury. While reasonable precautions, like not allowing someone with uncontrolled seizures to fly a plane, are sensible, excessive restrictions can take the fun out of life and further stigmatized a person with epilepsy.

So how do we decide which activities are reasonable and which are not worth the risk? There is no general answer to this question, however, four points should be considered.

The first point to look at is the nature of the person's seizures. Some seizures are minor and do not pose much risk. They may be the simple partial type, which occur with only an internal feeling or a fleeting sensation. Complex partial seizures and absence seizures are more of a risk during recreation, because of the associated confusion and memory loss. Tonic-clonic seizures, meanwhile, present an even higher level of risk for injury.

Second, it is important to look at how well a person's seizures are controlled. While there is no precise definition of seizure control, patients who have not have seizures for a year or several years are considered to be in good control. Meanwhile, those having several seizures per month have poor seizure control. The boundaries are imprecise, because even after years of being seizure-free another seizure is always possible.

Third, the risk level of an activity should be considered since different recreational activities pose different risks. People with seizures usually can participate in low-risk activities, even if their seizures are not in good control. But a medical care professional first should be consulted

Some low risk activities are running, bowling, golf, baseball, basketball, soccer and volleyball. Medium-risk activities may be done if seizures are mild or infrequent, but of course review your individual circumstances with your medical team. Some medium-risk activities include football, hockey and ice skating, bike racing, gymnastics, horseback riding, swimming in shallow water with a buddy, and boating.

As a general rule, if having a seizure during a recreational activity would likely cause you significant harm, then use common sense and avoid the activity.



High-risk recreational activities include hang gliding, motor sports, skiing, competitive skateboarding, mountain or rock climbing and scuba diving. Some doctors recommend not engaging in high-risk recreational activities at all if you have a history of epilepsy, but at the very least, a person should not participate in high-risk recreation unless he or she has been seizure-free for years.



A final consideration in determining what recreational activities are safe for a person with seizures is the risk level that person is willing to assume. Doctors and families can and should give advice, but assuming that the person with epilepsy is mentally competent, he or she should make the final decision.