

Should I disclose my epilepsy to my employer?

Having epilepsy does not always require you to notify your employer. Here are some examples when you may chose to rightfully withhold such information:

- Your epilepsy and seizures would have no impact or effect on your ability to do your job (work safety is the main concern)
- You do not require your employer to make accommodation adjustments to allow you to fulfill your position
- You have been seizure-free for over two years, disclosing to your employer that you have epilepsy may not be a critical issue

Before you decide whether or not you will tell your employer about your epilepsy, consider how your epilepsy affects you. Because everybody's seizures can differ, an ideal work place for one person may not be suitable for someone else. Take into account the work environment you'll be in and any potential problems or safety concerns that might arise.

- What type of seizures do you have?
- When do your seizures usually occur?
- Are there specific things that trigger your seizures?
- How do you feel after having a seizure?
- Do you experience adverse events from medication? Might they affect your work place abilities?
- Could your epilepsy be a safety issue for yourself or others?

Only you know what your needs are and the nature of your epilepsy.

How should I tell?

How you tell your employer may be more important than when you tell. Your tone and presentation will influence how your employer hears you. Sounding apologetic, hesitant, or fearful when disclosing will only alarm your employer and make your epilepsy seem like a bigger problem.

On the other hand, if you sound and appear confident, this will inspire confidence in you and reassure your employer that any difficulties can be surmounted. Confidently state your concerns concisely. Be prepared to explain issues pertaining to your employment (e.g. safety, any accommodations needed), but focus on how you are qualified for the position and how you can be an asset to the company. In this first conversation, keep your comments to work related issues.

Educate yourself and practice what you will say. Role-play your disclosure with a supportive friend or family member. Have a list of resources that you and your employer can refer to for more information.

When should I tell?

Application:

Should you choose to disclose on your application form, your employer may commend you on your honesty, yet they may quickly disqualify you without reviewing your qualifications. People who use this technique often find more difficulty in applying for a job, but typically have no work-related problems regarding their epilepsy when they are hired. Be honest.

There may be some specific considerations to your choice of a job. You should aim your job applications to positions unlikely to be affected by your epilepsy. Some examples of situations to avoid would be working around water, or an expectation of a professional drivers license. If your epilepsy is prominently affected by sleeping patterns, shift work might be avoided.

Interview:

The advantage of disclosing your epilepsy during the interview allows you to address any of your employer's concerns and bring to their attention any work accommodations you may require. Furthermore, due to your presence, you will less likely encounter discrimination. Before you decide to go ahead with this timing, ask yourself "how comfortable are you talking about your epilepsy?" During your interview, it is important to focus on your skills and what you can bring to the company, not how epilepsy affects your abilities.

Before Your First Shift:

Disclosing after your interview but before your first shift is another option. The disadvantage of this could be an unhappy employer. Your employer may feel that your epilepsy should have been brought forth before you were hired and reflect upon you negatively. Be sure you are prepared to explain why your epilepsy will not affect your work performance and how you can ensure work safety. If your employer changes his hiring decision, and you are confident your seizures do not hamper your ability to work, you may choose to take legal action.

After You Start:

Some people may wait after they start work to let their employer know about their seizures. This gives them the opportunity to prove themselves to their boss and co-workers. The longer you wait, the harder it becomes to disclose. Once your epilepsy is revealed, your employer may accuse you of withholding important information and falsifying your application – making it difficult to regain their trust. Of greater concern is the possibility of having a seizure on the job. Because no one will know about your condition, incorrect first aid may be given and harm could be done to yourself.

What If I've Been Seizure-Free?

If you have been seizure-free for over two years it may be less critical to disclose your epilepsy to your employer. An employer cannot react to your epilepsy unless you have a seizure. Nevertheless, if someone discovers you have epilepsy, you might face some negative consequences (e.g. lost of trust from staff, wrong first aid administered).

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Resources:

<http://www.epilepsyatwork.com/>

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