



International Epilepsy Day

Epilepsy Facts

1. Epilepsy is a chronic noncommunicable disease of the brain that affects people of all ages.¹
2. Epilepsy affects both males and females of all races, ethnic backgrounds and ages.²
3. Epilepsy is a condition in which a person experiences repeated seizures caused by abnormal electrical activity in the brain.
4. One seizure does not signify epilepsy (up to 10% of people worldwide have one seizure during their lifetime). Epilepsy is defined as having two or more unprovoked seizures.³
5. Seizures can look different for everyone. Seizures don't always involve shaking of muscles. A person may be unresponsive, lose consciousness, wander around and experience confusion, funny feelings tastes, or smells, or fall to the ground and shake.

¹ who.int/news-room/fact-sheets

² mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/epilepsy

³ who.int/news-room/fact-sheets

6. Epilepsy is a broad term used for a brain disorder that causes seizures. There are many different types of epilepsy. There are also different kinds of seizures.⁴
7. Epilepsy can be caused by a variety of factors, including genetic factors, head injury, brain infection, stroke, and abnormal brain development.⁵
8. Epilepsy can have a significant impact on a person's quality of life, and people with epilepsy may face stigma, discrimination and other challenges.
9. Epilepsy is one of the world's oldest recognized conditions, with written records dating back to 4000 BCE. ⁶
10. The Greek philosopher Hippocrates (460-377 BC) was the first person to think that epilepsy starts in the brain.
11. Epilepsy has affected several famous people, including Julius Caesar and Vincent Van Gogh.

Epilepsy Statistics

1. Around 50 million people worldwide have epilepsy, making it one of the most common neurological diseases globally.⁷
2. Globally, an estimated 5 million people are diagnosed with epilepsy each year. ⁸
3. Nearly 80% of people with epilepsy live in low- and middle-income countries.⁹
4. The death rate for people with epilepsy is three times that of the general population.¹⁰
5. The risk of premature death in people with epilepsy is up to three times higher than in the general population.¹¹

⁴ [cdc.gov/epilepsy](https://www.cdc.gov/epilepsy)

⁵ [who.int/news-room/fact-sheets](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets)

⁶ [who.int/news-room/fact-sheets](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets)

⁷ [who.int/news-room/fact-sheets](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets)

⁸ [who.int/news-room/fact-sheets](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets)

⁹ [who.int/news-room/fact-sheets](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets)

¹⁰ [who.int/health-topics/epilepsy](https://www.who.int/health-topics/epilepsy)

¹¹ [who.int/news-room/fact-sheets](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets)

6. Epilepsy rates are higher in low and middle-income countries, with some areas seeing rates as high as 10%¹²
7. An estimated 70% of people with epilepsy could live seizure-free if properly diagnosed and treated.¹³
8. An estimated 25% of epilepsy cases are preventable.¹⁴
9. Adequate perinatal care can reduce new cases of epilepsy caused by birth injury.¹⁵

Epilepsy Stigma

1. Fifty percent of adults with epilepsy experience social stigma as a result of their epilepsy.¹⁶
2. Some common misconceptions about epilepsy are that it is contagious, that it is a mental health condition, and that those with epilepsy cannot lead normal lives.
3. For people with epilepsy, negative attitudes toward epilepsy have significant social implications and impair quality of life.¹⁷
4. A person with epilepsy may experience reduced access to educational opportunities, a lack of driving privileges, and difficulty entering particular occupations.¹⁸
5. Many countries have laws reflecting centuries of misunderstanding about epilepsy, including those allowing marriages to be annulled because of epilepsy

¹² [who.int/health-topics/epilepsy](https://www.who.int/health-topics/epilepsy)

¹³ [who.int/news-room/fact-sheets](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets)

¹⁴ [who.int/news-room/fact-sheets](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets)

¹⁵ [who.int/news-room/fact-sheets](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets)

¹⁶ Baker GA, Jacoby A, Buck D, Stalgis C, Monnet D. Quality of life of people with epilepsy: a European study. *Epilepsia*. 1997 Mar;38(3):353-62. doi: 10.1111/j.1528-1157.1997.tb01128.x. PMID: 9070599.

¹⁷ Kwon, C-S, Jacoby, A, Ali, A, Austin, J, Birbeck, GL, Braga, P, et al. Systematic review of frequency of felt and enacted stigma in epilepsy and determining factors and attitudes toward persons living with epilepsy—Report from the International League Against Epilepsy Task Force on Stigma in Epilepsy. *Epilepsia*. 2022; 63: 573– 597. <https://doi.org/10.1111/epi.17113>

¹⁸ [who.int/news-room/fact-sheets](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets)

and those denying access to restaurants, theatres, recreational centers, and other public places.¹⁹

6. Epilepsy stigma can significantly delay diagnosis and treatment as some people are reluctant to seek medical help because of fear of discrimination.
7. Epilepsy-related stigma exists at all societal levels, impairing the quality of life and social well-being of people with epilepsy and their families.
8. Legislation based on internationally-accepted human rights standards can prevent discrimination and rights violations, improve access to health-care services, and raise the quality of life for people with epilepsy.²⁰

IGAP

The Intersectoral Global Action Plan on Epilepsy and Other Neurological Disorders 2022-31 (IGAP) is a 10-year roadmap launched by WHO to effectively address neurological conditions and improve the lives of people with epilepsy and other neurological conditions worldwide.²¹

IGAP at a Glance

[Download IGAP Unpacked](#)

¹⁹ [who.int/news-room/fact-sheets](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets)

²⁰ [who.int/news-room/fact-sheets](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets)

²¹ [who.int/publications/m/item/intersectoral-global-action-plan-on-epilepsy-and-other-neurological-disorders](https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/intersectoral-global-action-plan-on-epilepsy-and-other-neurological-disorders)

Myth vs Fact

Myth: Epilepsy is contagious

Fact: Epilepsy is NOT contagious - you can't catch epilepsy from someone else.

Myth: Epilepsy is a form of mental illness

Fact: Epilepsy is a neurological condition that affects approximately 50 million people worldwide.

Myth: All people with epilepsy must avoid flashing lights.

Fact: Only about 3-5%²² of people with epilepsy are photosensitive. As a result, the vast majority of people with epilepsy do not need to avoid flashing lights.

Myth: All seizures involve falling to the ground and convulsions

Fact: A convulsive (or generalized tonic-clonic seizure) in which the person becomes unconscious, rigid and shakes is just one of the many different types of seizures. Seizures involve different parts of the brain and depending on which part of the brain is involved, different physical symptoms can occur.²³

Myth: You should put something in a person's mouth during a seizure.

Fact: This myth stems from a mistaken belief that during a seizure, people can swallow their tongue or suffocate. In fact, it's physically impossible to swallow your tongue and you should never force something into the mouth of someone having a seizure or try to hold their tongue. You could damage teeth, puncture gums, obstruct someone's airway, and even break their jaw, as well as injure yourself in the process.²⁴

Myth: Epilepsy will affect a person's ability to take part in sports or other leisure activities.

Fact: In most cases, it won't.²⁵ A lot will depend on the degree of seizure control and the type of sports activity involved. Everyone's epilepsy is different, but as long as it's safe for the individual to take part and they let their coaches and teammates know how best to help them in the event of a seizure, then they can enjoy their chosen sport.

²² [Photosensitive epilepsy | Epilepsy Society](#)

²³ [Epilepsy Myths and Misunderstandings | Epilepsy Ireland](#)

²⁴ [Epilepsy Myths and Misunderstandings | Epilepsy Ireland](#)

²⁵ [Epilepsy Myths and Misunderstandings | Epilepsy Ireland](#)