



Health & Safety Alert #09-03-02

Seizure Triggers

The Ohio Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities is providing alerts to the field with the goal of preventing or reducing the possibility of future serious incidents. (Note: This alert was originally sent in the Vision Newsletter on December 22, 2000. It has been updated and is now being sent through this means to ensure a broader distribution and more lasting access.) Please share this alert with all staff involved in planning, providing or overseeing services.

Situation: A number of MUIs have resulted in serious injury or hospitalizations related to seizures. Seizure triggers include missed medications, fatigue, lack of sleep, stress, poor diet, excessive use of alcohol, withdrawal from alcohol, use of illicit drugs (particularly cocaine), illnesses, increased body temperature and fever, hormone changes in females, and for some individuals, flickering light patterns.

There are many factors that affect the excitability of neurons in the brain and the propensity to subsequent development of seizure activity. In some individuals, seizures can be caused by the presence of a precipitating factor. This concept is referred to as a seizure trigger, or exceeding the seizure threshold of the individual. Each individual with epilepsy has a unique seizure threshold and a distinct response to potential seizure triggers.

Alert: Interventions to minimize the effect of seizure triggers:

- Take anti-epileptic medication as prescribed.
- Exercise, but not to the point of “over doing it.”
- Plenty of rest and good sleep habits.
- Avoid extended periods without food or drink.
- Avoid use of alcohol or illicit substances.
- Maintain regularly scheduled medical checkups; seek treatment for illness; treat fevers.
- Avoid situations that may increase body temperature, such as hot tubs or hot baths, or high environmental temperatures.
- For individuals with photosensitive epilepsy, avoid or minimize exposure to precipitating factors (e.g., television).

Some general precautions for persons with epilepsy and seizure triggers:

- Turn down household water temperature to avoid scalding and burns if seizures occur in bathtub, and to avoid marked increase in body temperature while bathing.
- Consider taking showers to avoid risk of drowning in tub.
- Always have someone available who can provide help if a seizure occurs while bathing or swimming, and supervise young children closely.
- Wear a life jacket while swimming or if near water.
- Discuss with your physician appropriate exercise and sports participation.

For questions or comments regarding the above Alert, please contact the MUI/Registry Unit at (614) 995-3810.

January 2004