

Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog

Editor's Note: Content presented in the Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog is for awareness and informational purposes only, and it is not meant to be a diagnostic tool.

I was doing some research the other day, and I came across an article that was written by an author, Phylis Feiner Johnson, who has epilepsy. Ms. Johnson continuously writes about making the best of her situation with epilepsy. She started off her article with the following quote by Barbara de Angelis, “No one is in control of your happiness but you; therefore, you have the power to change anything about yourself or your life that you want to change.”

In my opinion, the context and basis for her article about happiness was how Ms. Johnson dealt with her own diagnosis of epilepsy. She said, “We all know that epilepsy is no day at the beach. You may feel depression, anxiety, fear, isolation, anger, or a whole host of other things, too many to mention. But, if you dig deep into yourself, perhaps there's a few things you can do to relieve those feelings.”

Below are some ideas about that Ms. Johnson espouses to help her deal with her epilepsy everyday of her life.

1. Laugh a little. Laughter can improve your EEG results!

Scientists traced the brainwave activity of people responding to funny material when hooked up to an EEG and measured their brain activity when they laughed. In each case, the brain produced a regular electrical pattern. Because less than a half-second after exposure to something funny, an electrical wave moves through the cerebral cortex. Human beings love to laugh, and the average adult laughs 17 times a day, leaving your muscles relaxed for up to 45 minutes after.

And laughter is catching! In addition to the domino effect of joy and amusement, laughter also triggers healthy physical changes in the body. It relaxes the whole body. A good, hearty laugh relieves physical tension and stress. It dissolves negative emotions. It dispels anger. After all, how can you be angry if you are laughing? Or depressed.

2. Focus on the positive.

Too often, our negative experiences color our view of the past. Instead of focusing on all the times you have had seizures, think of all the times you have not, and you are more likely to find that seizures constitute a small part of your life. It is often a matter of putting things into a more realistic perspective. For example, worrying about having a seizure in a certain situation is actually wasted energy, because the seizure may not even occur.

3. Gratitude is the attitude.

Make a mental list of things you are grateful for each day before retiring for the night. Write them down so that you can remember them when you get the blues and need a boost. Who knows, sometimes just thinking about them might make you smile! Your attitude to epilepsy will influence your emotions and behavior. It is possible to learn to substitute positive thoughts

for negative thoughts. You know, mind over matter. For example, rather than saying to yourself “I am going to have a seizure, I know I am,” try thinking positively. The mind is a very powerful tool. Some people find that positive self-talk can actually prevent seizures.

4. Give to others.

The satisfaction of helping others will boost your self-esteem. Once you develop an inner strength and learn to help yourself, then try to be a mentor to others who suffer from epilepsy. Go out into the epilepsy community and teach others how to live with their epilepsy from a positive perspective. Using the knowledge, you have gained, will teach others how to cope with the fears, anxiety, depression, and anger that is part of their lives. If we stay strong, it is a wonderful role model and others with epilepsy will try to stay strong too.

5. Talk, talk and talk. Educate others about epilepsy.

The first thing is to share your epilepsy and feelings with your family. Not so easy. Since many relatives are in denial, this might be a bit tricky. It is also supremely important to educate everyone you can: parents, of your own and other’s parents, nurses, teachers, employers, colleagues, EMTs, hospital staff, police, firemen, public personnel, prison wardens, judges and yes, legislators. As the Director of Community Education at Epilepsy Alliance Ohio, I am always ready, willing, and able to educate others about epilepsy. When you see a need for epilepsy education and awareness, be sure to contact me at Steve.Hutton@epilepsy-ohio.org.

6. Stop to smell the roses.

Be mindful of what surrounds you. Mindfulness may be described as the ability to pay deliberate attention to our experiences from moment to moment, to what is going on in our mind, body, simply, and without immediate judgment. For example, focus on your surroundings. Whether it is trees and birds, a beautiful building, people watching, a fabulous meal. Take yourself into the moment and leave your negative thoughts behind. And do not forget to make time for play!

7. Exercise

Regular physical exercise may have a moderate seizure preventive effect in 30-40 per cent of the patient population, while for about 10 per cent, strenuous exercise may provoke seizures. Clinical and experimental studies have analyzed the effect of physical exercise on epilepsy. Although there are rare cases of exercise-induced seizures, studies have shown that physical activity can decrease seizure frequency, as well as lead to improved cardiovascular and psychological health in people with epilepsy. It is a great tool since it makes you feel good mentally and brings positive physical changes in your body. Exercising clears the mind, and sometimes can soothe the soul.

8. Socialize

Hang out with positive people. Having someone in your immediate social circle who is upbeat increases your chances of happiness by 15 per cent. Why? Because happy people have the power to spread their feel-good vibes far and wide. Not only do immediate friends matter, but friends of friends, too. So, make plans to have lunch with a friend or go for a walk together (If you do have lunch with a friend make sure you wear a mask and social distance.). It could put a smile on your face, besides what have you got to lose? Slowly, reach out. It is not hard to make friends if you

put in the time. Listening, appreciation, caring and love will come back your way. Phylis Feiner Johnson looks at friendship like a flower. The more seeds you plant, the more blooms will grow.

9. Music

Not surprisingly, music has also been found to have a profoundly positive effect on people with epilepsy. In fact, one research study even found that when patients are treated with music therapy as well as conventional anti-seizure meds, as many as eighty percent of seizures were reduced!

10. Read

You might have trouble focusing, concentrating, or even remembering what you just read, but give it a try. Start with cartoons or illustrations that make you laugh. Mad Libs are fun. And all you have to supply is one word. Then graduate to easy magazines like “People” or “Car and Driver.” Next, try some easy to read “beach books” or sports books. Someone has said, books are man’s (and women’s) best friends. You can take a temporary leave of absence from reality and bury yourself in one of your favorite books. A lot of wise people have been through what you are going through, and they made it through to the other side to talk about it.

11. Try something new and creative.

There can be a creative side to the electrical mischief that epilepsy produces. Some types of epilepsy can spark inspiration, enhance creativity, and bring out the latent artist in you. It can be as diverse as writing...painting...drawing...dramatics...architecture...philosophy...or physics...to name just a few.

Researchers claim that often these surprise talents are associated with temporal lobe epilepsy. In this case, the sides of the brain, where memory and feelings reside, are intermittently seized by those “electrical storms” which produce the creative spark. Although the seizures may be undetectable to observers, they can prompt hallucinations, religion, fury, fear, joy, and an unquenchable desire to create, even after the seizure is over. So, you may not know it, but you may have some surprise artistic talents hidden away. Give it a try. Dabble a little. It is exciting, energizing, rewarding, all-encompassing, and I must admit, a wonderful escape. Like turning lemons into lemonade!

12. Dream a little.

Believe it or not, some of your aspirations can become reality. Phylis Feiner Johnson’s parents told her that she would never amount to anything. At age 14, she sat on her grandfather’s knee and told him she wanted to be a writer. Her grandfather took her very seriously. He was the only one who believed in her. So, I started my own business on his birthday. Just a little tribute to his love and support. Phylis Feiner Johnson is an accomplished writer, but she was not about to let the negative expectations by her parents hold her back.

If you feel that your child is suffering from anxiety, always consult the appropriate medical or psychological professional.

Editor’s Note: The Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog will be distributed and posted weekly.

Always remember – CARPE DIEM – SEIZE THE DAY!

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