

# 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.*

Does Age Affect Onset of Epilepsy? More than 570,000 people who are 65 years or older have epilepsy. Adults are the fastest growing group for this disorder. Research from Jacqueline A. French, MD, Neurologist at New York University Comprehensive Epilepsy Center, and member of the American Academy of Neurology, explains that the two periods of a person's life when they are most likely to develop epilepsy is during childhood and when they are sixty-five or older.

Seizures in the elderly occur for a range of reasons, but up to 50% of the causes in the elderly are unknown. Those who develop adult-onset epilepsy will often try to hide the fact for a range of reasons. They believe, and rightly so, that there is still a stigma attached to those who have epilepsy.

## **Why Do Adults Have an Increased Risk of Developing Seizures?**

A study that analyzed the database from the National Veterans Affairs office found that people who suffered from cerebrovascular disease, cerebrovascular dementia, head injuries, brain tumors and various brain disorders were more likely to develop seizures. The study also found that those patients who had a statin prescription were less likely to develop adult-onset epilepsy. More research is necessary before doctors can recommend utilizing statins to help with epilepsy, of course.

## **Can Tumors Cause Seizures?**

A study (Lyman et al.) has found that in some cases, tumors could cause seizures. These can occur at any age and seizures could be the “the first presentation of metastatic disease.” The Lyman study found that 43% of people who had seizures from metastases did not have any previous cancer diagnosis.

## **The Dangers of Trauma**

Seizures in the elderly could also occur because of some type of trauma. Trauma can be a large factor for those who are over sixty-five, as they are more prone to falls, which could cause head injuries. This is estimated to account for about 20% of the seizures in the elderly. These types of injuries are more dangerous to older patients than they are to younger patients.

Anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs), which are used to control seizures, can affect balance. This can be very worrisome for the elderly who may feel unsteady on their feet. Read more about the effect of AEDs on balance in our blog, [Can Anti-Epileptic Drugs Cause a Loss of Balance?](#)

## **Neurodegeneration Diseases**

Alzheimer's, a neurodegeneration disease, could also increase the risk of adult-onset epilepsy. A study (Scarmeas et al.) found that “unprovoked seizures, already more prevalent in the

background population, are perhaps not as markedly increased in Alzheimer's patients as previously believed." However, those who had Alzheimer's disease at a younger age were at an elevated risk of developing adult-onset epilepsy.

### **Psychiatric**

Psychiatric issues are often common with patients who suffer from epilepsy regardless of the age. The issues could include things such as depression and anxiety, for example. A 2009 study (Ettinger et al.) compared new onset epilepsy with psychiatric conditions in Veterans alongside a control group of Veterans. They found that psychiatric conditions were more common with those who had new onset epilepsy. This and other studies show that there is a connection between epilepsy and psychiatric disorders, but they do not fully show causality.

Seizures in the elderly are more common and it does appear that aging affects seizures. Of course, more studies need to be completed to learn more about the potential causes for seniors who have adult-onset epilepsy.

Sources:

[http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/733423\\_3](http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/733423_3)

[http://www.todaysgeriatricmedicine.com/archive/spring2011\\_p30.shtml](http://www.todaysgeriatricmedicine.com/archive/spring2011_p30.shtml)

***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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