

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.

As we are on the precipice of entering the holiday season, you will want to be proactive in preventing any triggers for your child's seizures. Epileptic seizures can occur at random times without warning, but many people find that their seizures are precipitated by specific triggers. Many things can trigger seizures, and each person's experience is different. A seizure trigger can be a specific sight or sound, a substance, or a physiologic state (such as having low blood sugar).

Most seizure triggers can increase excitability in the brain, increasing activity and lowering the seizure threshold. Triggers do not cause epilepsy (the underlying [causes](#) of epilepsy vary from genetic predisposition to illness and injury) but rather put your brain into a state where it is more likely to have seizure activity. It is important to identify what triggers your seizures and to learn how you can avoid those triggers.

Common Seizure Triggers

Some of the most common seizure triggers include:

- Missing a dose of epilepsy medication
- Stress
- Lack of sleep
- Caffeine
- Flashing lights or patterns
- Low blood sugar
- Time of day
- Hormonal changes
- Fever
- Infection or other illness

Missed Medication

Failure to take your anti-seizure medications (ASMs) as prescribed is one of the most common seizure triggers. ASMs work by preventing seizure activity in the brain, but for the medication to work properly, you must have a high enough level of medication in your bloodstream. Missing a dose or taking the wrong dose of your AED can decrease these levels and trigger seizures.

Stress

Stress is another commonly reported trigger. Emotional or psychological stress, including anxiety, anger, depression, or other heightened emotional states, can trigger a seizure in some people. Stress can also contribute to other triggers, such as lack of sleep.

Inadequate Sleep

Lack of sleep is one of the top triggers for epileptic seizures in many people. Lack of sleep may be due to a change in schedule, insomnia, medication side effects, poor sleep quality, alcohol consumption, caffeine consumption, and even seizures during sleep.

Caffeine

Caffeine is a commonly used stimulant that can lower the seizure threshold. Coffee, tea, soda, and chocolate can all have high levels of caffeine. When taken in large amounts, caffeine and other stimulants can increase the excitability in the brain. Some medications, including over-the-counter options, can change how the body processes your ASMs, leading to seizures. **Always check with your health care provider or pharmacist to see if any of your medication or supplements interact with your epilepsy medication.**

Flashing Lights

Flashing lights and certain patterns (such as optical illusions that appear to move) can trigger seizures in some people with photosensitive epilepsy. The frequency of flashing light that triggers seizures varies from person to person. Sometimes, high-contrast geometric patterns can also trigger these types of seizures.

Low Blood Sugar

Low blood sugar, or hypoglycemia, may trigger seizures. Skipping meals or eating at irregular times can cause fluctuations in blood sugar.

Hormonal Changes

During the normal menstrual cycle, the female body goes through changes in levels of the hormones estrogen and progesterone. Changing hormone levels can be a seizure trigger.

Fever

High fever due to infection or other illness can cause febrile seizures. Children are more susceptible to febrile seizures than adults.

How To Identify Your Seizure Triggers

Identifying what specific triggers you are susceptible to is the first step in finding ways to avoid triggering seizures. Identifying what induces your seizures can also help you and your health care provider pinpoint your diagnosis and determine the best treatment for your situation.

To figure out what triggers your child has try keeping a journal of their seizures. Journal entries could include:

- The time and date of the seizure
- Your physical location
- What you were doing at the time
- The dose and time of your last AED
- What you had been eating and drinking, especially if it includes alcohol or caffeine
- What other drugs or medications you had been taking, including prescription, over the counter, herbal, and illicit substances
- How much sleep you had
- Your mood

It is also important to note if your child experiences auras before their seizures. Auras can be visual disturbances, odd physical sensations, or emotions that you experience before your seizure. In epilepsy, auras can be types of seizures.

I have done previous blogs about seizure triggers. One can never receive too much information about seizure triggers. Be proactive and preventative and know your child's seizure triggers.

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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