

Mersey Region Epilepsy Association

Registered Charity Number: 404366



SUDDEN UNEXPLAINED DEATH IN EPILEPSY SUDEP

When somebody who has epilepsy dies suddenly with no obvious other cause of death the death is recorded as being due to SUDEP. It is relatively rare but nevertheless people should be aware that epilepsy can be attributed as a cause of death.

It is not fully understood what causes SUDEP but it is likely that when it occurs the seizure interferes with the mechanisms in the brain that control breathing and heart function.

The risks are low but are increased when seizure control is not good. It follows that the common sense action of taking antiepileptic drugs as and when prescribed will reduce the risks. They can also be reduced by avoiding seizure triggers such as excessive drinking, using recreational drugs that might provoke seizures and making abrupt unsupervised changes in medication

Other factors to reduce risk are not as controllable. These include experiencing a seizure when there is nobody around especially when asleep.

You are unlikely to get all the answers you are looking for from reading short articles such as this, useful though they may be. If you do have concerns about SUDEP the best place to find out more about your own situation is to sit face to face with your doctor or epilepsy specialist nurse. Your questions will be answered directly, sensitively and offer reassurance.

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