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pregnancy and labour

Pregnancy

All should be aware that 90% of women with epilepsy enjoy normal pregnancies and deliver perfectly healthy babies. Any possible risk of adversities for the other 10% can be minimised by wise preparation and medical advice.

20% of women with epilepsy experience a decrease in seizures during pregnancy, 50% experience no change in seizure pattern and the remaining 30% experience an increase in seizures.

The increased seizure pattern is very often due to the expectant mother reducing levels of antiepileptic medication for fear that the drugs may harm the developing baby. Since potential damage to the baby is greater as a result of experiencing major convulsive seizures than it is from drug side effects it is vitally important that the drugs are taken when and as prescribed.

Sexually active women of childbearing age should take vitamins which contain folic acid and should continue taking the preparation for at least the first three months of any pregnancy. The reason for this is that the risk of miscarriage and of fetal malformation is thought to be considerably reduced by taking folic acid.

A team comprising of the woman's GP, her neurologist, her obstetrician and her midwife should provide the medical care during a pregnancy. It is this team which can provide advice when some difficult decisions may have to be made.

Labour

Because the birth process can be a stressful and traumatic event there is a chance that seizures may occur during this period. It is a wise precaution, therefore, that careful consideration is given to hospital confinement rather than home confinement. Hospital confinement is the much preferred option.

It should be decided if a companion should or should not be present at the birth to offer support.

The delivery of the child should not be different than that of other mothers other than there being a risk of a seizure occurring. This risk is low and can be reduced even further by taking medication regularly and resting sensibly during the pregnancy. Medication should be continued during the labour period albeit that the woman might well have other things on her mind!

Most babies are given vitamin K after delivery and this is particularly likely in the case of babies born to women who have been taking antiepileptic drugs. This is normal procedure.