How can I find out more?

You can contact the Epilepsy Foundation. Call 1-800-332-1000 or visit www.epilepsyfoundation.org. Through the Web site or the toll-free number, you can also find the Epilepsy Foundation affiliate closest to you.

This pamphlet is intended to provide basic information to the general public. It is not intended to be, nor is it, medical advice. Readers are warned against changing medical schedules or life activities based on this information without first consulting a physician.

“With children signs of depression are often different than in adults so starting education for the child and parent early in therapy may help with mood disorders and prevent behavioral problems, while also reducing stress and anxiety for both parents and children.”

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Understanding the Behavioral Aspects of Epilepsy

800-332-1000
www.epilepsyfoundation.org

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Five major mental health problems associated with epilepsy are:

- Attention disorders
- Depression/Mood disorders
- Anxiety disorders
- Psychoses
- Personality disorders

Perhaps the most common behavioral problem that is found in children with epilepsy involves the ability to maintain attention—such as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). This problem can be present before or after the onset of seizures. If the problem is significant (causing a problem in school), then treatment may be useful. Behavioral as well as medical treatments are available. There is minimal, if any, risk of worsening seizure control with the available medications.

Depression is one of the most common mood disorders for people who have epilepsy, as well as for those without epilepsy. Depression and other mood disorders can actually have a greater affect on quality of life than the number of seizures a person is having. There are a lot of reasons people with epilepsy can have mood disorders—or be at risk for them—including:

- Taking certain antiepileptic drugs (for instance, phenobarbital)
- Being genetically predisposed
- Experiencing stress and poor communication
- Having an inappropriate treatment
- Having a mood disorder
- Having an intellectual disability related
- Developing epilepsy at an early age
- Experiencing different types of seizures
- Experiencing family history of psychosis
- Experiencing intellectual disability related
- Experiencing different types of seizures that severely limit participation
- Experiencing other chronic diseases

Depression increases a person’s risk of suicide, so anyone who is depressed and feels, or seems, suicidal should seek help as soon as possible. Furthermore, depression and other mood disorders are treatable, particularly with:

- Education about symptoms and danger signals and how to respond to them
- Reevaluation of any medicines the person is taking
- Appropriate use of antidepressants and psychotherapy, depending on the severity of the problem

It is important to note that depression increases a person’s risk of suicide, so anyone who is depressed and feels, or seems, suicidal should seek help as soon as possible. Furthermore, depression and other mood disorders are treatable, particularly with:

- Education about symptoms and danger signals and how to respond to them
- Reevaluation of any medicines the person is taking
- Appropriate use of antidepressants and psychotherapy, depending on the severity of the problem

With children signs of depression are often different than in adults so starting education for the child and parent early in therapy may help with mood disorders and prevent behavioral problems, while also reducing stress and anxiety for both parents and children.

It is important to determine if a person has an actual anxiety disorder from the anxiety that accompanies a chronic disease, especially one, like epilepsy, characterized by unpredictable interruptions in activities. In addition, some people experience anxiety during their seizures, but this is self-limited and should not require treatment other than that given for seizures.

Anxiety is common in individuals with epilepsy, but it can be difficult to separate an anxiety disorder from the anxiety that accompanies a chronic disease, especially one, like epilepsy, characterized by unpredictable interruptions in activities. In addition, some people experience anxiety during their seizures, but this is self-limited and should not require treatment other than that given for seizures.