

Health and safety in the workplace

Good occupational (or workplace) health and safety practices (WHS) help ensure wellbeing in the workplace. People living with epilepsy make excellent workers, and properly considering and meeting WHS obligations for employees with epilepsy will result in a safer, inclusive and more productive work environment.

Workplace health and safety is both an individual and shared responsibility. Business owners, workers, officers, suppliers and manufacturers have a variety of WHS obligations determined by the legislation in their state or territory, and relative to their industry. [Click here](#) for a list of acts, regulations and agencies that may be applicable to your situation.

While the precise wording and legal requirements mandated in each state or territory may vary, common to these acts is the idea that actions must be taken to protect health and safety, as well as manage risk in the workplace.

The risks that epilepsy poses in the workplace will vary greatly depending on the person and situation. Risk can depend on a number of factors including:

- The nature of the work or role. For example, there may be additional risks associated with seizures when work is conducted at a height, under extreme temperatures, or using dangerous machinery
- The nature of the workplace
- The level of uncontrolled seizure activity the person experiences. For most people living with epilepsy (around 70% of all diagnosed), anti-epileptic drugs fully controls their seizures
- The type of seizures the person experiences. The situation of a person experiencing tonic-clonic seizures will vary considerably from a person who experiences focal aware seizures, which may be barely perceptible and involve little movement
- Whether the person has identifiable seizure triggers. Some people with epilepsy can manage their seizure activity by avoiding things that tend to trigger seizures. This varies greatly depending on the person, although some commonly reported triggers include tiredness, alcohol and missed medication. As seizure activity is often affected by sleep, some people living with epilepsy may need to avoid night shifts or irregular work patterns
- Whether the person experiences warning signs before a seizure. Some people living with epilepsy experience warning signs prior to a seizure, which may give them an opportunity to remove themselves from a dangerous situation.

Assessing and mitigating the risks that affect the health, safety and welfare of people in the workplace is fundamental to:

- Meeting legal requirements
- Attracting and retaining valuable skilled staff. People living with epilepsy are excellent workers and can contribute greatly to a business or organisation
- Maximising employee productivity. Much like anyone else, people living with epilepsy are highly productive workers in a healthy and safe workplace
- Minimising injury and illness in the workplace
- Reducing the costs of injury and workers' compensation
- Ensuring you meet your legal obligations and employee responsibilities.

It is important to remember that blanket prohibitions are discriminatory and a fair assessment of the individual situation is fundamental to an inclusive workplace, while also meeting health and safety obligations. While not all people living with epilepsy identify as having a disability, it is notable that people with disabilities actually have a lower number of workplace health and safety incidents, as well as much lower workers compensation and costs, compared to the average employee.