



## Effective Accommodation Practices (EAP) Series

# Job Accommodations for People with Epilepsy

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## JAN'S EAP SERIES

### JOB ACCOMMODATIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH EPILEPSY

Epilepsy is the tendency to have repeated seizures that originate in the brain. There are several types of possible seizures that range from losing consciousness and massive muscles jerks to blank stares. For example, generalized tonic clonic seizures, also called grand mal seizures, look like the individual suddenly cries or falls; the individual may lose consciousness. On the other hand, generalized absence seizures or petit mal seizures look like a blank stare, beginning and ending abruptly, lasting only a few seconds.

The following is a quick overview of some of the job accommodations that might be useful for employees who experience epilepsy. For a more in depth discussion, access JAN's publications at <http://AskJAN.org/media/atoz.htm>. To discuss an accommodation situation with a consultant, contact JAN directly.

#### **Cognitive/Neurological Limitations:**

##### *Memory*

- Provide written information to employee
- Post written information in a central location
- Use a wall calendar
- Use a daily or weekly task list
- Provide verbal prompts or reminders
- Use electronic organizer on computer or hand-held device

##### *Disorientation/Disorganization*

- Put employee's name plate on desk and/or door
- Provide building directory or employee directory by name, floor, unit, etc.
- Label items at desk (in-box, this week's videos, etc.)
- Use nametags (or other identification) for all employees
- Have auto-dial programmed on phone that connects to supervisor or other numbers

##### *Time Management/Performing or Completing Tasks*

- Provide verbal prompts or reminders
- Provide written or symbolic reminders
- Use alarm watch or beeper
- Avoid isolated workstations
- Work in teams of two or more
- Use clear timeframes or deadlines
- Make daily/weekly task list

### **Office Equipment Use:**

- Use large-buttons with universal symbols (fire, police, doctor) and clear labels
- Post directions and write down access codes, long distance account number, etc.
- Identify contact person to answer questions (example: secretary)
- Provide retraining
- Change schedule so employee is never first person in or last person out

### **Gross and Fine Motor Limitations:**

#### *Driving*

- Pair employee with co-worker who can drive to meetings or events
- Reassign driving to another employee, if driving is not an essential job function
- Transfer employee to a position that does not require driving
- Adjust schedule so employee can access public transportation
- Form a carpool with co-workers (to/from work)

#### *Balancing/Climbing*

- Use rubber matting on floor area to cushion a fall
- Use stepping stands with handrails and rolling safety ladders
- Reassign climbing to another employee, if climbing is not an essential job function
- Provide head, eye, and harness protection
- Have arm rests on chairs to prevent falling out of chair

#### *Managing Fatigue*

- Use anti-fatigue matting on the floor
- Provide flexible start or ending times
- Adjust workweek
- Provide area to take nap during breaks or lunch

#### *Ensuring Safety*

- Designate a person to respond to emergencies and know when to call 9-1-1
- Keep aisles clear of clutter
- Provide a quick, unobstructed exit and post clearly marked directions for exits, fire doors, etc.
- Provide sensitivity training to employees

### **Seeing/Hearing/Communicating:**

- Allow employee time to recuperate from seizure (
- Identify hand signals or other universal signals that employee might use to communicate with another person
- Assist employee in discontinuing activity such as carrying, climbing, or driving
- Educate coworkers and supervisors on how to respond/react when employee has a seizure on the job
- Consult employee's plan of action to determine how to respond/react when employee has a seizure on the job

**Photosensitivity:**

- Use flicker-free monitor (LCD display, flat screen), monitor glare guard, "computer glasses," and take frequent breaks from tasks involving computer
- Replace fluorescent lights with full spectrum lighting, use desk or floor lamps, and use natural lighting source (window) instead of electric light

**Attendance/Absenteeism:**

- Allow employee to remain on the job after a seizure, if possible
- Provide flexible schedule or workweek, if possible
- Count all absences due to seizure activity as one occurrence

**Inappropriate Behavior:**

- Understand employee's limitations, and be prepared for behaviors such as: drooling or spitting, urination on self or on furniture, and inappropriate behavior such as trying to push or kiss someone
- Allow employee to keep change of clothes at the workplace
- Provide private space for employee to go when exhibiting such behavior
- Have employee alert co-worker/supervisor when seizure is about to occur
- Provide sensitivity training/disability awareness to coworkers

**Seizures on the Job:**

- Try to reduce or eliminate triggers so seizure activity is less likely to occur. Some triggers include: hormonal changes (pregnancy, menstruation, aging); sensitivity to fragrances or other chemicals in the workplace; stress on the job; and disruption in daily activities due to working varied shifts (such as sleeping, taking medications, or eating)

**Resources Specifically for People with Epilepsy****American Epilepsy Society**

342 North Main Street  
West Hartford, CT 06117-2507  
Direct: (860)586-7505  
Fax: (860)586-7550  
Info@aesnet.org  
<http://www.aesnet.org>

**Epilepsy Foundation of America**

8301 Professional Place  
Landover, MD 20785  
Toll Free: (800)332-1000  
Fax: (301)577-2684  
Email: [ContactUs@efa.org](mailto:ContactUs@efa.org)  
<http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org>

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