

Epilepsy Demystified

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March is the month for raising awareness of the disorder that affects more than twice the number of people with cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, multiple sclerosis, and muscular dystrophy combined in Canada. Although epilepsy is not an uncommon neurological disorder with an estimated 15,500 new cases reported each year and an average of 42 people learning that they have epilepsy each day in Canada¹ alone, many myths and misconceptions have enshrouded this neurological disorder for many, many years.

Caused by the brief interruption of normal brainwaves, epilepsy is characterized by seizures of different types including simple, sensory distortions or sensations; sudden, momentary interruptions of consciousness; and convulsions that are commonly referred to as epileptic fits³. For a long time in history, epileptic fits were associated with curses, witch craft, and/or insanity², and many myths and misconceptions about epilepsy still exist today. Here are

10 Common Myths & Misconceptions about Epilepsy

(Compiled from www.epilepsy.ca & www.epilepsy.com)

MYTH

1) Epilepsy is a curse.

FACT

EPILEPSY HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH CURSES, POSSESSION, OR OTHER SUPERNATURAL PROCESSES, SUCH AS PUNISHMENT FOR PAST SINS. LIKE ASTHMA, DIABETES, AND HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE, EPILEPSY IS A MEDICAL PROBLEM.

2) Epilepsy is contagious.

ABOUT AS CONTAGIOUS AS A GUNSHOT WOUND! YOU SIMPLY CAN'T CATCH EPILEPSY FROM ANOTHER PERSON.

3) Only kids get epilepsy.

EPILEPSY HAPPENS TO PEOPLE OVER AGE 65 ALMOST AS OFTEN AS IT DOES TO CHILDREN AGED TEN AND UNDER. SEIZURES IN THE ELDERLY ARE OFTEN THE AFTER EFFECT OF OTHER HEALTH PROBLEMS LIKE STROKE AND HEART DISEASE.

4) You should restrain someone having a seizure.

NEVER USE RESTRAINT! THE SEIZURE WILL RUN ITS COURSE, AND YOU CANNOT STOP IT.

5) You can swallow your tongue during a seizure.

IT'S PHYSICALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO SWALLOW YOUR TONGUE.

6) You should force something into the mouth of someone having a seizure.

ABSOLUTELY NOT! THAT'S A GOOD WAY TO CHIP TEETH, PUNCTURE GUMS, OR EVEN BREAK SOMEONE'S JAW. THE CORRECT FIRST AID IS SIMPLE: JUST GENTLY ROLL THE PERSON ON ONE SIDE AND PUT SOMETHING SOFT UNDER HIS HEAD TO PROTECT HIM FROM GETTING INJURED.

7) You can't die from epilepsy.

EPILEPSY CAN BE A VERY SERIOUS CONDITION, AND INDIVIDUALS DO DIE OF IT. EXPERTS ESTIMATE THAT PROLONGED SEIZURES (STATUS EPILEPTICUS) ARE THE CAUSE OF MANY DEATHS IN CANADA EACH YEAR.

8) With today's medication, epilepsy is largely a solved problem.

EPILEPSY IS A CHRONIC MEDICAL PROBLEM THAT FOR MANY PEOPLE CAN BE SUCCESSFULLY TREATED (BY MEDICATION, SURGERY, OR A

9) People with epilepsy are disabled and can't work.

SPECIAL DIET). UNFORTUNATELY, TREATMENT DOESN'T WORK FOR EVERYONE, AND THERE'S A CRITICAL NEED FOR MORE RESEARCH.

PEOPLE WITH THE CONDITION HAVE THE SAME RANGE OF ABILITIES AND INTELLIGENCE AS THE REST OF US. SOME HAVE SEVERE SEIZURES AND CANNOT WORK; OTHERS ARE SUCCESSFUL AND PRODUCTIVE IN CHALLENGING CAREERS.

10) People with epilepsy shouldn't be in jobs of responsibility and stress.

PEOPLE WITH SEIZURE DISORDERS ARE FOUND IN ALL WALKS OF LIFE AND AT ALL LEVELS IN BUSINESS, GOVERNMENT, THE ARTS, AND THE PROFESSIONS. WE AREN'T ALWAYS AWARE OF THEM BECAUSE MANY PEOPLE, EVEN TODAY, DO NOT TALK ABOUT HAVING EPILEPSY FOR FEAR OF WHAT OTHERS MIGHT THINK.

Check out the list of famous people in history who had epilepsy, and for more information, contact Epilepsy PEI Inc., a non-profit organization offering information and support for people living or dealing with epilepsy in their lives:

[Epilepsy PEI@Yahoo.ca](mailto:Epilepsy_PEI@Yahoo.ca)

Paula at 892-3274/368-7337 or Dorothy at 902-854-2063

References:

- ¹ www.epilepsy.ca (Epilepsy Canada)
- ² www.epilepsy.com (The Epilepsy Project)
- ³ www.en.wikipedia.org

Did u know

had epilepsy?

- ALEXANDER THE GREAT
 NAPOLEON BONAPARTE
 JULIUS CAESAR
 PETER THE GREAT (OF RUSSIA)
 SOCRATES
 HARRIET TUBMAN
 (African American who led her fellow slaves to freedom on the Underground Railroad)
 SOREN KIERKEGAARD
 (Danish philosopher and father of existentialism)
 GEORGE FREDERICK HANDEL
 (German-born composer of the *Messiah*)
 NICCOLO PAGANINI
 (Italian violinist and composer)
 VINCENT VAN GOGH
 DANTE ALIGHIERI
 (Italian poet, author of *The Divine Comedy*)
 ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON
 (English poet)
 LEWIS CARROLL
 (Pen name for Charles Lutwidge Dodgson; English mathematician, logician, and author of *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*)
 CHARLES DICKENS
 FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY
 (Russian writer, author of *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*)
 COUNT LEO TOLSTOY
 (Russian writer, author of *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace*)
 GAUSTAVE FLAUBERT
 (French writer, author of *Madame Bovary*)
 DAME AGATHA CHRISTIE
 (English mystery writer)
 TRUMAN CAPOTE
 (American writer, author of *In Cold Blood* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*)
 RICHARD BURTON
 (British actor)

Source:

www.epilepsy.com