

29

EVERYONE CAN BE A LIFESAVER



Royal Life Saving

ROYAL LIFE SAVING SOCIETY - AUSTRALIA

FACT SHEET No. 29

Drowning & Epilepsy

Q. Is it safe for people with epilepsy to go in the water?

A. Yes, people with epilepsy can be very competent and confident swimmers, however extra precautions need to be taken. Children need to be actively supervised at all times (including when bathing) and adults should have a buddy with them either in the water or regularly checking up on them. Adherence to any prescribed anti-seizure medication is also important.

Q. What is the risk of drowning among people with epilepsy?

A. Studies report an increased risk of drowning among those with epilepsy, citing that they are between 5 and 15 times more likely to drown than people without epilepsy. In Australia, between 2005/06 and 2015/16, approximately 61 people with a history of epilepsy drowned. There were more males than females, with the highest age groups being 18-24 years and 35-44 years.

Q. How and where do people drown?

A. The home environment is the most common place for epilepsy related drowning, specifically in the bathroom. It is important to not lock the bathroom door to ensure assistance can be given immediately. After bathing, swimming was the next most common activity, followed by falls into water. People with epilepsy should always swim with a buddy.

Q. What precautions need to be taken for people with epilepsy when in the water?

A. The most important message is constant, active supervision, even when bathing. Specific drowning prevention strategies for those with epilepsy include: showering instead of bathing, sitting in a shower without glass and ensuring the drain can't be blocked. When swimming in public pools, it's a good idea to advise the lifeguard or person-in-charge of your medical/seizure history. Always go with a buddy and wear a lifejacket when boating or fishing. Those who have been diagnosed with epilepsy must ensure they adhere to any prescribed anti-seizure medication. It is extremely important to never leave a person with epilepsy alone around water regardless of age and ability.

Real Life Story – Fishing tragedy highlights drowning risk

Two friends went fishing at the local jetty. They were drinking alcohol and not wearing lifejackets. One left to go to his car and upon his return, found his friend floating face down in the water. The man in the water had a history of epilepsy and had not told his friend. He did not regularly take medication. This event highlights the need for family and friends to ask about medical conditions, avoid drinking around water, always wear a lifejacket when fishing and keep an eye on your mates when around water.

ROYAL LIFE SAVING HAS DEVELOPED A NUMBER OF FACT SHEETS ON WATER SAFETY ISSUES IN AUSTRALIA.

Contact Royal Life Saving on: **1300 737 763**
or download them from: **www.keepwatch.com.au**



If a person is found unconscious in or near the water and not breathing, treat as you would with any other drowning victim:

- Danger - check danger to self and others
- Check response by shouting "are you okay?"
- Send for help, call triple zero
- Clear and maintain airway
- Look, listen and feel for breathing
- If no signs of life, commence CPR
- If possible, use a defibrillator and follow instructions

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