Common Myths and Facts About Epilepsy

Myth: People With Epilepsy Can’t Do Things Others Can and Need Supervision.
Fact: Most people with epilepsy can do anything anybody else can do without supervision. There are successful people with epilepsy in all walks of life.

Myth: If Someone Has a Seizure, You Should Hold the Person Still and Stick a Spoon in the Person’s Mouth So the Person Doesn’t Swallow His or Her Tongue.
Fact: Never hold down a person having a seizure. Never put anything in the person’s mouth.

Myth: You Can Swallow Your Tongue During a Seizure.
Fact: It is impossible to swallow your tongue. There is no need to put a spoon or anything else into the mouth, a response that can injure the person having a seizure. Simply put something soft under the person’s head and roll the person gently on to his or her side.

Fact: The risk of birth defects among women with epilepsy is only slightly higher than the U.S. average. Even this risk can be reduced if women with epilepsy talk with their doctor before getting pregnant.

Myth: People Can Control Their Actions During Seizures.
Fact: Seizures are involuntary. People are unconscious during convulsions and some other kinds of seizures.

Myth: Most People Stay Awake During Seizures.
Fact: Most people are unconscious during seizures and don’t know what’s happening.

Myth: People With Epilepsy Can Be Violent.
Fact: If you try to restrain someone having a seizure, the person may have an involuntary — yet natural — reflex to protect him or her self. Instead, speak to the person reassuringly and guide the person away from situations where he or she could get hurt.

Myth: People Who Have Seizures Are Drunk or on Drugs.
Fact: No, but some seizures can appear as if a person is under the influence of alcohol or drugs. For example, symptoms such as mumbling, incoherence, displaying repetitive behaviors and similar activities may be mistaken for the outward signs of substance abuse.

Myth: Epilepsy Is Contagious.
Fact: You cannot catch epilepsy or give it to someone else.

Myth: Epilepsy Is Caused by Demonic Possession, Punishment for Sins or Witchcraft.
Fact: Epilepsy is a treatable medical condition. It can be caused by anything that damages brain cells, such as severe head injuries, brain tumors and infections, strokes, and problems before or during birth.