

## Reproductive Issues for Females

### Can I still have children if I have epilepsy?

- Women with epilepsy are as likely to become pregnant and have a healthy pregnancy as women without epilepsy.
- People with epilepsy seem to have fewer children. This is due to social, sexual, and physical factors.
  - Epilepsy and seizure medicines can cause changes in hormone levels. Hormone changes may affect interest in sex, menstrual cycles, and the ability to have children.
- Women taking more than one seizure medicine may have more trouble getting pregnant.
- Women with temporal lobe epilepsy may have changes in their menstrual cycle.
- Women with epilepsy are more likely to develop Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) which can change hormones and menstrual cycles. This is more common for women taking Valproate.

### How do seizure medicines and birth-control medicines affect one another?

- Some seizure medicines may make birth-control medicines not work and can lead to an accidental pregnancy.
  - Use contraceptives, such as a condom or diaphragm, in addition to birth-control medicines.
  - Birth-control medicines can also lower the amount of some seizure medicines in the body.
  - Tell your doctor if you are taking or starting birth-control medicine.
- If you have seizures around your periods, birth-control medicines might help reduce seizures.

### How do seizures and anti-seizure medicines affect pregnancy?

- Pregnancy is relatively safe for you and your baby.
- Seizure frequency stays the same during pregnancy in 50% of women with epilepsy.
  - You are more likely to not have seizures during pregnancy if you were seizure-free for 9 months before pregnancy.
  - Stopping your anti-seizure medicines just before or during pregnancy can increase the risk of seizures.
- Taking seizure medicine while pregnant will not increase your risk of miscarriage, premature labor, and other pregnancy or delivery complications.



## Reproductive Issues for Females (continued)

- Some seizure medicines are safer than others during pregnancy.
  - Valproate has the highest risk of birth defects. It can lower the baby's intelligence.
  - The risk of major birth defects is higher if the mother is taking more than 1 seizure medicine.
- Having a seizure while pregnant can be dangerous to you and your baby.
  - Folic acid can lower the chance of birth defects and it helps the baby's brain development.
  - Some seizure medicine levels drop during pregnancy. Your doctor will need to check medicine levels and may need to change the dose of your medicines.
- Talk to your doctor about pregnancy, if possible, a couple of years before trying to get pregnant!

## What are the chances that my child will have epilepsy?

- Some types of epilepsy run in families. Epilepsy can also skip a generation.
- There is a higher risk of having a child with epilepsy if:
  - One or both parents have epilepsy (the risk is higher if the mother has epilepsy).
  - One or both parents have generalized epilepsy.
  - Parents' seizures started early in life.

## Can I breastfeed if I take seizure medicines?

- Breastmilk is safe for most women taking seizure medicines. Talk to your doctor about breastfeeding.

## What safety precautions should I follow while caring for an infant?

- Dress, change, feed, and play with the baby on the floor instead of a high surface like a changing table.
- Limit time carrying the baby around the house, especially up and down stairs.
- If you often fall to one side during your seizures, hold the baby on the other side so you do not fall on the baby.
- Do not bathe the baby in a tub when you are alone.
- Do not carry hot drinks or heavy items around the baby.

