

# Epilepsy Awareness Day: How Sleep Affects

## Epilepsy

Almost 40,000 people in Ireland have Epilepsy. It is the fourth most common neurological disorder with it affecting 50 million people worldwide. Interestingly Epilepsy can affect the same part of the brain that regulates your sleep and according to The National Sleep Foundation, getting healthy sleep is a necessity for people with Epilepsy.

### What is Epilepsy

Epilepsy is a neurological disorder which affects the brain. The abnormal neurological firing may cause a sensory disturbance with strange sensations and making sounds and vision overwhelming, violent shaking or unconsciousness. Seizures are often associated with Epilepsy although a person may not have active seizures. A seizure is a brief and temporary disturbance of brain function. A person can have a seizure without necessarily having Epilepsy. Only when a person has had two or more seizures is he or she considered to have epilepsy. EEG's and brain scans are common ways to diagnose Epilepsy.

### What Causes Seizures

We are made of salt and water and therefore good conductors of electricity. Our neurological system relies on this electricity supply to work optimally. However, too much electrical activity can cause symptoms of violent shaking or unconsciousness and it can also appear as a blank stare like daydreaming. They can also be caused by brain injury or extremely low blood sugar.

### Sleep and Epilepsy Connection

Sleep and Epilepsy are very much connected. While we are awake during the day and resting the brain is not very active. At night time when we are sleeping the brain activity varies throughout each sleep cycle and can become more active at night than it is during the day. This is especially true during our active phase of sleep, REM sleep or dream sleep. These changes in electrical activity may trigger nocturnal or night time seizures. Nocturnal seizures can wake a person up feeling confused, not being aware that they just had a seizure. They may mistakenly think they have insomnia from these repeated wake ups and often feel very tired during the day with problems concentrating. This may go on for years without ever knowing why.

Sleep is controlled by the sleep/wake cycle and circadian cycles, which is regulated in the brain. The electrical charges involved with seizures are also located in the brain, therefore it would make sense that the two are connected.

People with Epilepsy have a double-edged sword problem with Epilepsy causing sleep disturbances and the lack of sleep aggravating epileptic seizures.

## Sleep Apnea

People with Epilepsy are at a higher risk of Sleep Apnea. In fact, approximately one third of people with Epilepsy had Sleep Apnea according to a study by University of Michigan and that these people were more likely to have seizures at night.

Obesity is another risk factor of Sleep Apnea and the drugs mainly used to treat Epilepsy, Anti-Epileptic-Drugs or AEDs, can cause weight gain. 70% of people have their seizures controlled by medication.

## Children and Epilepsy

10,000 children in Ireland have Epilepsy. Sleep is especially crucial for children with Epilepsy. They are still developing themselves and really need that deep restorative and repairing sleep. Sleep deprivation causes problems at school with lack of concentration, problems with learning and behavioural difficulties and it can also result with increased risk for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Parents themselves will have reduced sleep too, checking on their children during the night. A study by West Virginia University looked at the sleep habits of 50 parents of children (5 years old and younger) who had been diagnosed with epilepsy revealed that parents spent an average of 4 hours sleeping during the night; awaking at least 3 times to check on their children.

Set a sleep schedule and stick to it. Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day. Listen to your body. If you find yourself feeling drowsy on a consistent basis earlier than you have gone to sleep before, adjust your bedtime accordingly.

## Tips to get a better night sleep with Epilepsy

- Get sunshine first thing in the morning to help reset your circadian clock and sync you into the natural daily rhythms.
- Exercise and eat well. Do not drink alcohol or coffee especially in the evening or eat for at least 3 hours before you go to sleep.
- Check your medications. Ask your doctor if you can take your medicine earlier in the day if it is interfering with your sleep or to rule out that it is interfering with your sleep.

- If you are concerned you may have Sleep Apnea, ask your doctor to refer you to a sleep specialist where you can get a sleep lab test done, called a polysomnogram, where sleep technicians will monitor your brainwaves and heart rate etc., to detect Sleep Apnea and also nocturnal seizures.
- Create bedtime rituals. A relaxing bath with magnesium flakes or soothing music, stress and relaxation management techniques like mindfulness meditation, and any repeated, calming action can help you get to sleep quicker.

**Download the PDF – FREE Handout.** You are free to print and share this article, as long as the author bio stays intact, and no changes are made.

---

## References and Resources

<https://www.epilepsy.ie/content/epilepsy-explained>

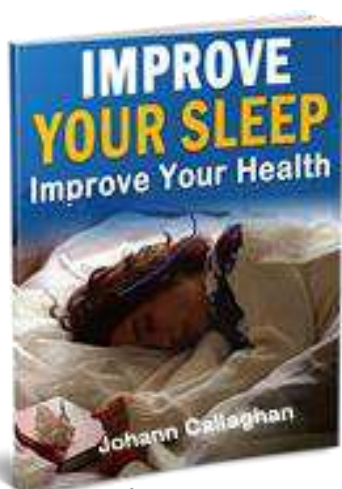
<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/epilepsy-and-sleep>

<https://www.tuck.com/epilepsy-and-sleep/>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11061259>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16151567>

---



**Want FREE sleep help that you can put to use right away?** Download a copy of our free guide, [\*Improve Your Sleep, Improve Your Health\*](#)! The guide is available to download instantly, which means you can start using the techniques in it as early as tonight. So download now, and learn *why* you are so tired – and what you can do about it.

[Click here to learn more about how to get your free guide.](#)

A better night's sleep could be just a few clicks away. So don't wait – download now, and start your journey to better sleep tonight!

---

Sign up for my free **Webinars**: <https://YourSleepSuccess.com> (Next Date 18<sup>th</sup> [March](#))

**How To Get A Good Night's Sleep Book**: <https://HowToGetaGoodNightsSleep.com> or on [Amazon](#).

For more information about **talks and events**: <https://JohannCallaghan.com>

Empowering Sleep Success **Online Program**: <https://EmpoweringSleepSuccess.com>  
(*This course is also available as a self-paced study course without me*)

Join the [Sleep Success Online Community](#) for Sleep Tips, Myths and facts.

# About Johann



Johann is a bestselling Author, Speaker, Online Trainer, Entrepreneur & Mum. She has featured many times in the media on radio, TV, newspapers and magazines. Johann's first book 'How to get a good night's sleep' has been a major success in Ireland and across the world.

Johann gives seminars, workshops and online training in health & wellness and is a go to sleep expert. Johann helps empower, inspire and educate mums to take back their own power and control to live a better, healthier and happier life with better sleep and a healthier lifestyle. Johann believes that we can be our own health care advocate and anybody with the right attitude, knowledge and inspiration can sleep better and improve their quality of life.

\*Note: You are free to print and share this article, as long as the author bio stays intact and no changes are made.