



EPILEPSY
Toronto
See the Person

Accommodations in the Workplace

**A Guide to Supporting Employees
Living with Epilepsy**



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Introduction

This manual provides guidance for employers, managers and HR professionals on accommodating employees with epilepsy in the workplace.

It shows how simple and effective adjustments can enable individuals with epilepsy to work safely and productively. By fostering an inclusive environment, employers can enhance workplace diversity, retain valuable talent, and comply with legal requirements related to disability accommodations under Ontario's Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and the Ontario Human Rights Code.

For additional epilepsy education support or seizure first aid training, please contact us at info@epilepsytoronto.org.



Understanding Epilepsy

What Is Epilepsy?

Epilepsy is a neurological condition that affects approximately 1-in-100 people in Canada, causing recurrent seizures due to abnormal electrical activity in the brain. Seizures vary widely in type, severity and frequency. **For 70% of people living with epilepsy, their seizures can be well-managed with medication.**

When referring to someone with epilepsy, use respectful, person-first language (e.g., 'person living with epilepsy.' Avoid terms like 'epileptic' or 'fits.'

What Is a Seizure?

A seizure is a temporary disruption of normal brain activity caused by sudden, excessive electrical discharges in the brain. This can affect a person's movement, behaviour, feelings, or level of awareness, depending on which part of the brain is involved. Since seizures differ dramatically from person to person, understanding each employee's specific type and needs is essential to providing accommodations.

*Some individuals may experience infrequent seizures that require **no workplace accommodations**. Others may need minor adjustments to thrive in their roles. With proper understanding and simple accommodations, employees with epilepsy can work safely and productively, contributing meaningfully to their workplaces.*



Types of Seizures

Seizures can present in many different ways depending on the individual and the area of the brain involved. The four most common types of seizures include:



Most people living with epilepsy do NOT experience seizures at work. The majority manage their condition effectively through medication and healthy lifestyle habits.

Generalized Tonic-Clonic Seizures:

These involve sudden loss of consciousness, muscle stiffening (tonic phase), and convulsions (clonic phase). A person may fall, experience shallow or paused breathing, and temporarily lose bladder or bowel control. Recovery may involve fatigue or confusion.

Absence Seizures:

Most common in children, these brief episodes cause a blank stare, often mistaken for daydreaming. They may include subtle movements like blinking or lip-smacking and typically last only a few seconds, with quick return to normal awareness.

Focal Impaired Consciousness Seizures

(Also known as focal seizures with impaired awareness)

These begin with a blank stare and may include repeated, involuntary movements (e.g., chewing, fumbling). The individual may appear confused or disoriented and not respond to others during the episode.

Focal Preserved Consciousness Seizures

(Also known as focal aware seizures)

These begin with movement in one part of the body, such as an arm, leg, or the face. They cannot be voluntarily stopped, but the person remains awake and aware throughout. Depending on where the seizure begins in the brain, individuals may also experience sensory symptoms, such as déjà vu, unusual smells, or changes in taste or hearing.

Watch videos about different seizure types:
epilepsytoronto.org/what-is-epilepsy/



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Triggers and Management

A trigger is any external or internal factor that increases the likelihood of a seizure occurring. Triggers vary from one person to another, but common triggers include stress, fatigue, flashing lights, illness, alcohol, missed medications, or hormonal changes. **Not everyone with epilepsy has identifiable triggers but for many, learning to recognize and avoid personal triggers is a key part of effective seizure management.**

One important way to support someone with epilepsy in the workplace is to help them avoid their known triggers.

People living with epilepsy are fully capable of holding roles with high responsibility. Understanding and managing personal seizure triggers can be key. While stress can be a trigger, many individuals develop effective strategies to reduce and manage it, allowing them to thrive in demanding roles.

If your organization would benefit from a more in-depth training session, please complete our presentation request form or email info@epilepsytoronto.org to book an educational session. These sessions are designed to help your team better understand epilepsy and how to effectively support employees living with it.



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Challenges In The Workplace

While many people with epilepsy thrive in the workplace, they may still encounter challenges that affect inclusion and equal opportunity. The table below highlights some common challenges and practical ways employers can address them.

| Challenge | Description | Impact on Employee | Potential Solutions |
|---|---|--|--|
| 1. Stigma and Misunderstanding | Misconceptions about epilepsy often lead to reluctance to hire or promote individuals with the condition. | Creates unequal opportunities and discourages disclosure, limiting access to accommodations. | Offer epilepsy awareness training for staff and foster a culture that supports inclusion. |
| 2. Lack of Workplace Accommodations | Employers often don't know what accommodations are needed, how to implement them, or where to start.* | Can lead to safety and liability risks, stress, and preventable job loss. | Develop clear accommodation policies and collaborate with employees to identify the strategies that best support their individual needs. |
| 3. Cognitive and Executive Function Issues | Many people with epilepsy experience some level of memory, concentration or self-monitoring difficulties. | May affect time management, planning, organization or task implementation. | Implement accommodations like written instructions, task reminders or breakdowns, visual checklists, and timers. |

*SOURCE: Employer survey

Why Accommodate a Person with Epilepsy?



Most employees with epilepsy can perform their roles safely and effectively with small, reasonable accommodations.

An inclusive workplace boosts productivity, reduces turnover, and fosters a culture of support. When employees feel supported, job satisfaction and retention often improve.

Under the Ontario Human Rights Code, employers have a duty to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability. **The Employment Standards and The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) build on this requirement.**

Accommodations are a shared responsibility where employers, unions and employees collaborate to identify and implement reasonable accommodations for people with epilepsy.

Hear from professionals why accommodating an employee with epilepsy benefits everyone.

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What Is AODA?

The **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)** is a provincial law that requires Ontario workplaces to identify, remove, and prevent challenges for people with disabilities.

In the context of employment, AODA ensures that hiring, training, and workplace practices are inclusive and accessible. Employers must provide accommodations that allow individuals with disabilities to perform their jobs safely and effectively. **This includes accessible recruitment processes, individualized accommodation plans, and emergency response information when needed.**

Understanding and applying AODA standards helps employers meet their obligations while building a supportive and inclusive work culture.

AODA Resources:

Learn more about Ontario's accessibility laws:
www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-laws

AODA training courses, including some that are virtual and free, are available for your staff and help promote inclusion and awareness.

Free AODA training for staff:
aoda.ca/free-online-training



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Considerations for Employers

Employers are encouraged to cultivate disclosure-positive environments so employees understand that they are in a safe space that welcomes diversity and respects privacy.

To support this, employers can include clear, accessible statements about confidential disclosure on their company website, job application forms, onboarding materials, and other key communication points.

Employer Responsibilities

- Ensure compliance with obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code and AODA regarding disability accommodations.
- Maintain confidentiality and handle medical information with sensitivity.
- Collaborate with employees to develop reasonable and effective accommodations.
- Foster an inclusive workplace culture that supports individuals with epilepsy.

Considerations for Employers



Did you know?

People with epilepsy have the same or fewer days away from work than the general population.

Benefits of Accommodating

- Increased employee retention and job satisfaction.
- Enhanced workplace diversity and inclusivity.
- Reduction in absenteeism and associated costs.
- Positive workplace morale and a supportive environment for all employees.

Funding and Support

- Employers may be eligible for financial incentives, such as the Canada Disability Benefit, to support workplace accommodations.
- The Second Injury and Enhancement Fund (SIEF) and other government organizations offer guidance and funding for disability accommodations.
- Epilepsy Toronto and other Epilepsy agencies across Ontario offer information sessions, online resources and employee retention programs.

Accommodations

Accommodations must be individualized; there is no one-size-fits-all solution. To help frame the possibilities, we've organized accommodations into the four common types.

- Foundational Accommodations
- Flexible Schedule
- Environmental and Technical Supports
- Job Carving and Role Restructuring



Foundational Accommodations

Foundational accommodations are basic, often simple adjustments an employer can implement that enable individuals to participate fully and equally in the workplace.

Seizure response planning

Having a Personal Seizure Response Plan that outlines clear steps for responding to an employee's seizure can help ensure safety and readiness for your entire team. A template is available on the Epilepsy Toronto website.

Download a Seizure Response Plan template: [epilepsytoronto.org/downloadable-resources](https://www.epilepsytoronto.org/downloadable-resources)



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First aid training for staff

Epilepsy can affect anyone at any age, so whether or not a current member of your team has epilepsy, ensuring that your staff are familiar with seizure first aid to respond confidently and effectively is always going to be a positive asset. Download an Epilepsy Toronto seizure first aid flyer.

Learn about seizure first aid: [epilepsytoronto.org/seizure-first-aid](https://www.epilepsytoronto.org/seizure-first-aid)



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Promoting a supportive, stigma-free culture

We encourage employers and staff to complete Epilepsy@Work, an online training that helps professionals build a more inclusive workplace culture.

URL: www.epilepsyatwork.com

Inclusive company policies in place

Have company policies on equity and inclusion that are up-to-date, readily available and adhered to. Ensure privacy-respecting policies that allow employees to request accommodations comfortably.

Story Highlight: Shonet's story illustrates the impact and importance of a supportive, workplace culture.

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Flexible Schedule

Flexible scheduling allows employees to manage their responsibilities effectively, helping the business maintain consistent operations.

■ Flexible start/end times and shift adjustments

Allowing adjustments to work hours to accommodate medical appointments, medication side effects, postictal seizure recovery time or periods of increased seizure activity.

■ Hybrid or remote work arrangements

Providing opportunities for remote work where feasible, to ensure job continuity in case of health fluctuations. Offering remote or hybrid work broadly helps maintain employee privacy by ensuring that flexibility isn't tied to any one person's health needs.

■ Gradual return-to-work programs after a seizure-related leave

Creating a return-to-work plan together, tailored to the employee's needs and paced to help them rebuild comfort in their role, signals strong employer support and fosters a positive, confident transition back.



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Download a RTW plan template: epilepsytoronto.org/rtw-plan-template

Story Highlight: Felicia's story shows teamwork in adjusting shifts and duties for safe, sustainable employment.

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Environmental and Technical Supports

Creating a supportive work environment involves thoughtful adjustments to the workspace and access to tools that can protect safety, promote recovery, and support productivity.

■ Setting up quiet rest areas for recovery after seizures

For some employees with epilepsy, just knowing that there is a place they can go to recover is comforting enough to reduce stress and avoid seizures.

■ Adjusting workspace to reduce triggers

Adjusting lighting, sound, temperature, or scents to minimize an employee's specific triggers can significantly improve productivity and safety.

■ Reducing physical hazards

Some examples include rounded corners on furniture rather than sharp corners, plush carpeting under their desk, or removing the door to their office space, so that others are aware and can reach them should they have a seizure.

■ Access to assistive tools

A range of tools can help increase safety, reduce triggers, and support comfort for employees with epilepsy. Examples include AI-generated meeting notes, reminder alarms, fall-detection monitors, migraine or blue-light-reducing glasses, noise-cancelling headphones, anti-glare screen filters, white noise machines, and desk fans. Mobile apps for seizure tracking, mindfulness, memory support, and checklists, as well as computer programs like speech-to-text, text-to-speech, and digital organizers, can also help employees manage workloads more easily.

Story Highlight: David's story shows it is possible to reduce hazards at work and adjust small details for your employees to feel more comfortable.

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Job Carving and Role Restructuring

Job carving and role restructuring involve adjusting job duties, responsibilities, or work conditions to match an employee's strengths and safety needs while maintaining productivity and business continuity.

■ Task modifications

For some people with epilepsy, adjusting their job duties to avoid potentially hazardous activities, such as working at heights, operating heavy machinery, or driving, could greatly reduce the threat of injury.

■ Duty reassignments

Some roles can be redesigned by redistributing tasks or adapting how they are performed. Consider adjusting where certain duties are completed if on-site conditions pose safety risks, providing additional time for training when duties require gradual skill development, or exchanging certain responsibilities with a coworker, such as trading ladder work for inventory tasks.

■ Driving and transportation accommodations

In Ontario, individuals must be seizure free for at least six months before driving a personal vehicle and five years before driving a commercial vehicle. When driving restrictions apply, adjustments such as duty reassignment, remote work, or transportation supports can help maintain employment. Examples of support may include offering transit passes, rideshare chits or coordinating carpools.

■ Ensuring continuity and safety

When carving roles for employees who don't have total control of their seizures, a priority will be to ensure that if a medical event should occur, the business can continue operating without undue hardship. This means identifying positions where temporary interruption is manageable, so inclusion is supported while safety and continuity are preserved.

Story Highlight: Sara's story shows how small task modifications can build trust, safety, and long-term success.

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Accommodation Success Stories

These personal stories highlight ways inclusive workplaces have successfully supported employees with epilepsy.



Shonet's Story



When Armagh House, a non-profit transitional housing program for women and children fleeing abuse, began searching for a People and Culture Manager, they were thrilled to find Shonet. With nearly 20 years of experience in the field, she has been a tremendous asset since joining them.

"Shonet is great. She came in and hit the ground running," says Jannies Le, Executive Director of Armagh House. "I can't say enough good things about her."

The feeling is mutual. **"From a job satisfaction perspective, I love it. I feel happy to work here. I love the people. I feel comfortable. And I feel like I'm authentically me,"** says Shonet.

Shonet experienced her first seizure in 2012, but since those early days, she has learned a lot about epilepsy, her triggers, and her overall health. She discovered that getting adequate sleep, eating well, exercising regularly, and maintaining a low-stress life are key to avoiding seizures. When she joined Armagh, she was given the option to create her own schedule, enabling her to maintain a healthy and balanced lifestyle.

"The environment and culture at Armagh have really played into the fact that I haven't had any seizures since I've been here. It speaks to how comfortable the space is for me, how freeing it is to be able to create my own schedule, and to work from home when I need to.

"The fact that there's an openness to talk about my health challenges and needs, or discuss my epilepsy in general, makes all the difference."

At Armagh, prioritizing the well-being of staff has truly paid off. Shonet leads the Staff Wellness Committee that plans wellness activities year-round. They offer a comprehensive benefit package that includes physical and mental health support. In an industry known for high burnout and low retention rates, offering flexible work options and self-care hours makes a difference. "When we think of all the time, money, and effort it requires to recruit, onboard and retrain new employees, investing in programs that enhance our culture is impactful," says Jannies.

**Watch
Shonet's
Story**



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David's Story

When you meet David, in his Home Depot apron, covered in badges, pins and buttons, his pride in the job is unmistakable. It's no accident that David has worked at Home Depot for 14 years.

"I've been working at Home Depot for so long that when I get different types of seizures, it really is not such a big deal because all of my managers will know how to handle it."

David was diagnosed with epilepsy at age 12 and experiences two types of seizures. The first, focal impaired consciousness seizures, occur frequently and may cause him to wander or appear as if he's daydreaming. "I tend to tell people as soon as I meet them, 'I'm not ignoring you, I'm not trying to be rude - it's just how my seizure looks.'"

When this type of seizure occurs while David is at the cash register, managers guide him to safety, and another team member steps in while he recovers in a quiet place in the staff room.

David's second type of seizure is **tonic-clonic**, which are less frequent for him, and usually happen at night or first thing in the morning, at home. When one occurs, he may need time to recover. If he has to miss a shift, his managers are understanding, and Home Depot has an online system where coworkers can pick up extra shifts - something David often does himself once he's feeling better.



On the rare occasion that David does have a tonic-clonic seizure while at work, his coworkers know how to respond, and foam padding was added to the register's sharp edges for extra safety.

After a wrist injury David sustained during a seizure outside of work made cashier duties difficult, his managers reassigned him as a greeter, a role that fits him perfectly. "It's always fun for me to talk to people, that's just the way I love to be. So being a greeter was the perfect solution."

"I feel like a very appreciated person here. This is probably why I am still here." David explains. "Having people around me that are familiar with my condition is definitely very helpful, and I feel a lot more confident because of that."

Watch David's Story



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Felicia's Story



Felicia thrives in the fast-paced world of neurology nursing in downtown Toronto, bringing calm focus and genuine care to every patient she meets.

Felicia was diagnosed with epilepsy in her early twenties while working long hospital shifts during the pandemic.

Her seizures began subtly, brief moments that looked like daydreaming, but sometimes progressed into tonic-clonic seizures. In her previous job, she didn't feel supported, so she hid her symptoms and overworked herself, which only made things worse.

Her current workplace has been a completely different experience. "It's very reassuring knowing that no matter what's going on with my health, my manager has my back. That takes a huge weight and stress off my shoulders, which ultimately is setting me up for success," she says.

Felicia's main trigger is lack of sleep, a challenge for any nurse who works nights. After discussing it with her employer, they reduced her night shifts from half her schedule to just 20 percent, never on consecutive nights. When she's having what she calls a "bad brain week," her manager gives her extra flexibility.

"I've never once felt that not being able to work as many nights makes me less of a nurse. And not once have I ever felt like my colleagues perceive me as less of a nurse because of it," she says. "We work in a way that helps everyone." She enjoys the energy of busy morning shifts, while others are glad to pick up extra nights for the premium pay.

Her team also supported her recovery after a tonic-clonic seizure led to a concussion. Small adjustments, like having coworkers handle tasks that required ladders or heavy lifting, allowed her to return safely. "By giving me the tools to come into work, the hospital allows me to put 100% of my love and passion into this job, and I hope my patients feel that back."

Watch Felicia's Story



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Sara's Story



You don't have to spend long with Sara to see that she's driven, capable, and proud of her work. After years in the service industry, she's faced challenges with determination and grace.

When Sara first told her managers she had epilepsy, she was working at a busy café and experiencing tonic-clonic seizures, the kind that causes loss of consciousness and rapid muscle jerking. Her managers were understanding and made small but meaningful adjustments. Instead of serving hot soup, she covered the cash register, a simple change that made a big difference to her safety and confidence.

Following brain surgery, Sara's seizures changed. Now she experiences focal preserved consciousness seizures. During these, she might stare off, turn her head, or make small repetitive movements. They last only seconds, and though she can't respond, she remains aware of what's happening.

Today, Sara works at a mobile café where everyone knows about her epilepsy. On the rare occasions she has a seizure while serving a customer, she handles it calmly. "Sometimes they don't even notice, but if they do, I just apologize, and if I've felt the need to, I'll say, 'I have epilepsy, and sometimes this happens. Can you repeat what you were saying, please?'" She adds, "It's no big deal."

Sara credits her success to supportive workplaces, family and her own resilience. "If people in the workplace are willing to accommodate a person with epilepsy, we're hard workers. We can do things just as well as anyone else, and there's a determination that comes with having a disability, to overcome it or just make the best of it."

She smiles. "I'm a hard worker. I'm definitely strong-willed. Maybe even because of my epilepsy, I'm determined to do things properly, because I don't want to be seen as someone with a disability. I just want to be seen as a person."

Watch
Sara's
Story



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06

Glossary

Absence Seizure:

Typically brief, characterized by a blank stare and sometimes small movements such as blinking or chewing. Most common in children and may be mistaken for daydreaming.

AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act):

A law in Ontario that aims to improve accessibility for people with disabilities, including workplace accommodations.

Assistive Technology:

Devices or software that support individuals with disabilities in performing tasks. For epilepsy, this may include reminder alarms, seizure tracking apps, or tools for managing memory challenges.

Aura:

A type of focal preserved awareness seizure that acts as a warning sign before a larger seizure. It can cause unusual smells or tastes, visual changes, or sudden emotional shifts. Not everyone with epilepsy experiences auras.

Cognitive Accommodation:

Supports that help individuals manage thinking-related challenges such as memory, attention, or problem-solving. Examples include written instructions, task reminders, or extra time to complete assignments.

Epilepsy:

A neurological disorder characterized by recurrent seizures.

Reasonable Accommodation:

Modifications or adjustments to a job or work environment that enable a qualified individual with a disability to perform essential job functions.

Seizure:

A sudden, uncontrolled electrical disturbance in the brain that can cause changes in behavior, movements, feelings, and levels of consciousness.

Triggers:

Environmental or physiological factors that can provoke seizures in some individuals.

Resources

AODA Resources

Information on accessibility laws and compliance requirements.

URL: www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-laws or www.aoda.ca



Epilepsy@WORK

A free e-learning course for employees and co-workers to increase their understanding of epilepsy and how to accommodate someone in the workplace.

URL: epilepsyatwork.com



Epilepsy Education Session Request Form

URL: <https://forms.gle/VHeJUp4AEajcGqvLA>

Epilepsy Toronto Website

Information on epilepsy, employment services, seizure first aid and more.

URL: epilepsytoronto.org

Ontario Human Rights Commission

Guidance on disability rights and employer responsibilities.

URL: www.ohrc.on.ca



Personal Plan Templates

Downloadable Seizure Response and Return to Work (RTW) Plans are available at epilepsytoronto.org/downloadable-resources

Second Injury and Enhancement Fund (SIEF)

A program that helps employers offset the costs of workplace injury claims.

URL: wsib.ca/en/operational-policy-manual/second-injury-and-enhancement-fund-sief



Seizure First Aid Flyer

Download a printable flyer: epilepsytoronto.org/seizure-first-aid-flyer/



Seizure Types and First Aid videos

Short videos that explain seizure types and how to respond.

URL: epilepsytoronto.org/what-is-epilepsy