

Disability Awareness: Epilepsy

Seizures -- abnormal movement or behavior due to unusual electrical activity in the brain -- are a symptom of epilepsy. But not all people who appear to have seizures have epilepsy. In contrast, epilepsy is a group of related disorders characterized by a tendency for recurrent seizures.

Non-epileptic seizures (called pseudo-seizures) are not accompanied by abnormal electrical activity in the brain and may be caused by psychological issues or stress. This type of seizure may be treated with psychiatric intervention.

Provoked seizures are single seizures that may occur as the result of trauma, low blood sugar (hypoglycemia), low blood sodium, high fever, or alcohol or drug abuse. Fever-related (or febrile) seizures may occur during infancy and children usually outgrow them by age 6. After a careful evaluation to estimate the risk of recurrence, patients who suffer a single seizure may not need treatment.

Seizure disorder is a general term used to describe any condition in which seizures may be a symptom. In fact, seizure disorder is so general that it is not a useful term. Unfortunately, "seizure disorder" is often used to avoid the term epilepsy.

Who Is Affected by Epilepsy?

Epilepsy is a relatively common condition, affecting 0.5% to 1% of the population. In the United States, about 2.5 million people have epilepsy. In fact, about 9% of Americans will have at least one seizure during their lives

What Causes Epilepsy?

Epilepsy occurs as a result of abnormal electrical activity originating from the brain. Brain cells communicate by sending electrical

signals in an orderly pattern. In epilepsy these electrical signals become abnormal, giving rise to an "electrical storm" that produces seizures. These storms may be within a specific part of the brain or be generalized, depending on the type of epilepsy.

Types of Epilepsy

Patients with epilepsy experience more than one seizure type. This is because seizures are only symptoms. Therefore, it is essential that your neurologist diagnose your type of epilepsy, not just the type(s) of seizure you are having.

How Is Epilepsy Treated?

The majority of epileptic seizures are controlled through drug therapy. Diet may also be used along with medications.

In certain cases in which medications and diet are not working, surgery may be used. The type of treatment prescribed will depend on several factors including the frequency and severity of the seizures as well as the person's age, overall health, and medical history.

An accurate diagnosis of the type of epilepsy is also critical to choosing the best treatment.

Coping With Epilepsy

Educational, social, and psychological treatment are all part of the total treatment plan for epilepsy. The most important step you can take is to seek help as soon as you feel less able to cope. Epilepsy is best managed by a team of doctors allowing the patient not only to have medical but psychosocial and educational supports. If you have a problem with school, work, or daily activities, it is important for you to discuss it with a member of the epilepsy team. Taking action early will enable you to understand and deal with the many effects of epilepsy.

<http://www.webmd.com/epilepsy/guide/understanding-seizures-and-epilepsy>

Local teen's dream of attending Olympic games fulfilled

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By MAREESA NICOSIA, The Saratogian

BALLSTON SPA — Sixteen-year-old Mollie McEvilly isn't one to shy away from a challenge the size of a mountain.

The Ballston Spa high school student is a serious athlete who lives with epilepsy — which causes her to suffer seizures about every two weeks — and she deals with the physical and mental disabilities it brings with it every day.

Since childhood, Mollie has tackled the slopes as a competitive downhill skier and won medals in horseback riding and swimming in the Special Olympics Winter Games. Last summer she learned kayaking and sailing through the STRIDE Adaptive Sports program based in Rensselaer. She also plays soccer.

Skiing is her forte, however, and Mollie gets up early nearly every Saturday morning and travels to Jiminy Peak Mountain in Massachusetts to practice with her STRIDE race team. The weekly event is a family affair, as her parents, sister and grandmother are also avid skiers.

This week she's putting down her poles temporarily in favor of living her dream: taking a seat in the stands to watch the winter Olympics. Along with her family, Mollie will spend today through Friday in Whistler, British Columbia, watching the games.

She was nominated to have her wish granted through the Northeast New York chapter of Make-A-Wish Foundation, by STRIDE founder and CEO Mary Ellen Whitney. Make-A-Wish grants the wishes of about 100 area children each year.

"I was so excited I was crying," Mollie said, of learning that she was headed north for the week of school vacation. "I want to go to the

winter Olympics because I like to watch it on TV, and I always wanted to go in person."

Mollie said she'll be cheering the hardest for American alpine skier Lindsey Vonn, the 25-year-old World Cup champion.

"She's an inspiration because even though she got hurt, she got right back up," Mollie said.

Those who know her say Mollie is a role model for others in her community and school. As a member of Ballston Spa's B.R.I.D.G.E.S. (Building Responsibility Integrity and Dependability Guarantees Everyone's Success) program for students with disabilities, she volunteers time working at local businesses, learning life and job skills along the way.

The other half of the program helps meet students' individual academic needs.

"Mollie is a perfect example of what a kid with disabilities can do when given an opportunity," said her teacher, B.R.I.D.G.E.S. program coordinator Andrew Greenwald. "So many times people just sort of push kids with disabilities and special needs aside, but there's so much that they can give back to our communities."

In the future, Mollie said she sees herself raising awareness about the seizure disorder that she and nearly 3 million other Americans face.

"I still want to ski and race but I just want to help kids with epilepsy," she said. "I just want people to be aware of what epilepsy is."

<http://www.saratogian.com/articles/2010/02/15/news/doc4b78c7d7d6677805452022.txt>