Epilepsy is a common condition in South Africa with 1 in every 100 people affected and worldwide slightly less common with 1 in 200 people. Globally World Epilepsy Day raise awareness about Epilepsy on 9 February and South Africa also honor a National Epilepsy week on the 15 – 21 June 2015, with National Epilepsy day on the 21st of June.

Epilepsy means the tendency to have recurrent seizures. It is a physical condition that may be triggered by a chemical imbalance or structural abnormality in the brain. This condition may result in recurrent, unprovoked seizures or convulsions and/or unconsciousness. This convulsive disorder is the expression of a sudden, excessive, disorderly discharge of electric activity in the brain. The onset usually occurs before the age of 20, yet many children outgrow the disorder and live drug- and symptom free as adults.

What can cause Epilepsy?
- Previous head injuries,
- Lack of oxygen during the birth process or other birth injuries,
- Infections (e.g. meningitis, encephalitis),
- Hemorrhage (bleeding in the brain),
- Strokes,
- Tumors (growths),
- Substance abuse,
- Degeneration (aging) and
- Disturbances or imbalances (Metabolic or biochemical)

What triggers seizures?
- Forgotten or incorrect medication,
- Fever,
- Lack of sleep,
- Stress and excitement,
- Boredom,
- Substance abuse,
- Photosensitivity (flickering lights e.g. a TV screen, rare and well controlled),
- Startle response,
- Illness,
- Sudden, rapid unexpected movements (motion sickness),
- Hormonal changes,
- Temperature extremes (Heat and humidity, or freezing)

Despite the available knowledge on Epilepsy, sufferers still get stigmatized and polarized by society. Epilepsy is not contagious neither is it an illness, disease, mental condition or a psychiatric disorder. Epilepsy doesn’t discriminate against race, sex, social background, intelligence or income: anyone can get it! The best society can do is to understand the mechanics behind Epilepsy and to know what to do in case a person experiences a seizure.

Is there any treatment for Epilepsy?
- Treatment with anti-convulsants to prevent seizures can assist up to 80% of Epileptics to control their condition. Strict adherence to the treatment regime is required.
- Anti-convulsants may interact with other drugs and patients should always disclose all the drugs they are taking to their medical practitioner and consult with their medical practitioner before taking any other medicine such as antidepressants, oral contraceptives, cough and cold preparations, anti-nausea or motion sickness drugs.

Can it be cured?
- Many children outgrow the disorder to live drug- and symptom free as adults.
- Sadly there is no guarantee that the condition might become cured by any form of treatment.

For example women of childbearing age who are on treatment with enzyme inducing anti-epileptics such as carbamazepine, phenytoin and phenobarbital should be cautioned that these drugs will decrease the effectiveness of oral contraceptives and they should try other options such as an intrauterine device.
What to do when a person has a seizure?

- Remain calm and note the time the seizure commenced,
- Clear the space around the person, preventing possible injuries and crowding,
- Remove jewelry and spectacles,
- If possible place a soft cushion underneath the epileptic's,
- Roll the person on his side, top leg bent, bottom arm slightly extended,
- Wipe his mouth to facilitate breathing,
- Reassure the person until he has regained orientation and has recovered,
- Allow the person to rest or sleep and if needed cover with a blanket
- Note the time the seizure lasted and the person has become re-orientated, give such information to the relevant medical person that will be attending to the Epileptic,
- Do understand the condition,
- Have empathy for the disruption and the interruption it has on the Epileptic's daily routines.

What not to do?

- Don’t panic,
- Don’t put your fingers or any object inside the mouth,
- Don’t allow spectator value,
- Don’t restrict the persons movements,
- Don’t put anything in his or her month,
- Don’t discriminate,
- Don’t exclude them from participating in social events or careers.

Where can a person suffering from or affected by Epilepsy get help?

- Contact your hospital or clinic, general practitioner, social worker, employee health and wellness programme, or teachers for information,
- Search the web – the South African Epilepsy Society at www.epilepsy.org.za ,
- Join a support group such as ‘You are not alone’,
- Download and use the app or website as www.seizuretracker.com to log and track seizure activity, dr’s appointments, medical schedules etc.