

Guidance

Canoeing with Epilepsy

This information aims to help you and your parents if under 18, your coach, club, or outdoor centre to work out what risks are relevant to you if you have epilepsy and are considering taking part in the sport of canoeing.

Background

Canoeing is a great way to relax, exercise and enjoy the outdoors. It is an extremely diverse sport so deciding on what sort of canoeing you do is something that everyone needs to consider. Any decision to participate needs to be made on an individual basis.

If you have epilepsy, considering the following questions may help you to decide whether to participate in canoeing:

- What are your seizures like?
- When do your seizures happen?
- Do you get a warning that a seizure is going to happen?
- What would help make the activity safer for you?

Epilepsy can vary greatly from person to person, so risks may depend on the type of epilepsy you have and what happens when you have a seizure.

Having a seizure in water is especially dangerous so it is essential to carry out a risk assessment before participating. In canoeing assessing risks and taking safety measures are an integral part of the sport.

Staying Safe

What do I need to do?

Whether you have epilepsy or not the most important safety measure is to learn how to paddle under qualified and experienced coaches. British Canoeing has a network of clubs, outdoor centres and qualified coaches that offer training. Coaching will cover safety awareness, rescue as well as the skills you will need. To find a club or outdoor centre near you click [HERE](#)

Once you have mastered the basics in canoeing you should: -

- Paddle with other people (this is normal practise in canoeing)
- At least one person who you paddle with should know basic rescue/life saving techniques and know about your epilepsy and how to deal with a seizure while canoeing.
- Always wear a properly fitted buoyancy aid. If you are in circumstances where you may be temporarily alone, unsupervised or in open water the need for a standard or self inflating life jacket should be considered as part of your risk assessment.
- Wearing a medic alert bracelet or necklace

N.B. When starting canoeing or if you change the place at which you paddle, always declare your medical condition. **Don't put others in danger who may need to rescue you.**

What Safety Measures are right for you?

Working with your coach, club or Outdoor Centre

You (or your parents if you are under 18) must complete a personal risk assessment before participating in canoeing. This should be in collaboration with people who can advise you on both the canoeing and medical risks. These could include your canoeing coach, any medical professionals involved in your care, club, outdoor centre, etc.

The Epilepsy Society, <https://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk/> has produced more safety information. This includes Risk Assessment templates “About your seizures” and “Safety outside the home”. These help you identify personal risks in sport and physical activity. These templates can be found [Here](#)

The areas you will need to consider relating to canoeing are: -

- How regular are your seizures? When was your last seizure? Are your seizures controlled (stopped) with medication?
- Seizure warning – When do you know a seizure is going to happen? Can you alert others? Can you get to a safe/safer place?
- Do you have seizures where you become unconscious, confused or were only partly aware of what is happening?
- Do you have seizure triggers such as stress or tiredness?

Seizures in Water

If someone is having a seizure in water and the person's awareness is unchanged:

- Make sure you are in a position to assist without endangering yourself
- Call for help and remove the person from the water as quickly as possible
- Help the person to a safe place; and
- Stay with them until the seizure is over

If someone has a seizure and loses consciousness you should:

- ✓ Support the person in the water so their face remains above the surface.
- ✓ Do not restrain the person but get them out of the water as soon as possible.
- ✓ Check their breathing; if they have stopped breathing commence CPR. Or place them in the recovery position.
- ✓ Call an ambulance even if the person appears fully recovered.

Attending events/paddling away from your home waters

There are thousands of different events to take part in throughout the UK every year. Event organisers have a duty of care to ALL participants. At events, particularly those which involve a journey, it is often impractical for the event organiser to provide enhanced safety cover over and above those measures which cover all participants. In an assumed risk sport such as canoeing it is essential that you present yourself at the event in a way that is safe for you and others.

If the environment is significantly different to your home waters you may need to seek advice from your coach, club or outdoor centre on any increased risk and further precautions or notifications that may be required.

This guidance is issued by British Canoeing. For more information about epilepsy visit <https://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk/>