

Story Idea: *Photosensitivity and Epilepsy*

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Did you know the flickering patterns on a television screen can prompt a seizure? As can video games, disco balls and flashing holiday lights.

Photosensitive epilepsy, also known as *visually provoked seizures*, is triggered by computer or video game monitors, strobe lights, car headlights, and other types of flashing lights and visual stimuli. Among the 3 million Americans with epilepsy, approximately 100,000 experience this condition, which is more common in children and adolescents and less frequent in adults. It is important for your audience to know that television is the most widespread stimulus for photosensitive seizures and American youths spend an average of 1500 hours per year watching television, according to the A.C. Nielsen Company.

Story Resources

- *Photosensitivity and Seizures* information sheet.
- [Photosensitivity and Seizures](#) (Epilepsy Foundation Web site).
- [Shedding Light on Photosensitivity, One of Epilepsy's Most Complex Conditions](#) (by Giuseppe Erba, M.D., Special to *EpilepsyUSA*).
- [Cartoon-based illness mystifies Japan](#) (CNN).
- **The Epilepsy Index**, an educational Web resource for general epilepsy information, www.epilepsyfoundation.org/answerplace/index.cfm.

Suggested Interview Questions

- Can photosensitive epilepsy be treated?
- How can a photosensitive person reduce the chance of experiencing a seizure?
- How can the broadcast industry help photosensitive people?
- Could where you live make you more susceptible for photosensitive epilepsy?
- How do the flicker, intensity, area and pattern of the stimuli work together to cause a person to have seizures?
- If someone experiences a seizure what should be done?
- What should NOT be done if you see someone experiencing a seizure?
- How can you tell if someone is experiencing a seizure?

Fast Facts

- Out of the more than 3 million Americans who have some form of epilepsy, approximately 100,000 (about 3 percent) are photosensitive.
- In December 1997, about 700 Japanese children had seizures while watching Pokémon, an anime series.
- Photosensitive epilepsy is usually diagnosed by having an EEG with photic (flickering) light or pattern stimulation.
- Genetics plays a definite role with regard to photosensitive epilepsy, gender is a factor, and physical condition and current physical state contribute to photosensitivity.
- About 60 percent of those with photosensitivity are female, but boys tend to have more seizures due to photosensitivity due to their propensity to play video games.

Interview Opportunities

- Eric Hargis, president and CEO, the Epilepsy Foundation.
- Physician specialist.
- Person living with photosensitive seizures.

About the Epilepsy Foundation

The Epilepsy Foundation, a national nonprofit with affiliated organizations throughout the United States, has led the fight against epilepsy since 1968. The Epilepsy Foundation will ensure that people with seizures are able to participate in all life experiences and will prevent, control and cure epilepsy through services, education, advocacy and research. For additional information, please visit www.epilepsyfoundation.org.