

Story Idea: *Seniors and Epilepsy*

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Several recent headlines regarding a much overlooked and frequently stigmatized condition underscoring that epilepsy can indeed strike anyone, of any background, at any time.

During the summer of 2007, Chief Justice Roberts, 52, experienced his second seizure, while just recently Senator Edward Kennedy, 76, experienced his first known seizure.

The truth of the matter is that one out of every 10 adults has experienced a seizure at some point in their lives; two or more seizures of an unknown cause are known as epilepsy. More than 300,000 of the more than 3 million Americans who have some form of epilepsy are seniors aged 65 or older.

As the baby boom generation increases in age so does the population of Americans with epilepsy. Of all the cases of epilepsy in the United States, about 70 percent are idiopathic, with only 30 percent of cases having a known cause.

The leading non-medical problem confronting people with epilepsy is discrimination in education, employment and social acceptance. In fact, some people with epilepsy do not even know they have it, since their doctors might tell them they have a *seizure disorder* instead. Meanwhile, people with epilepsy are at a real risk of physical injury due to prevalent myths about proper seizure first aid.

Story Resources

- [Chief Justice Is Hospitalized After Seizure](#) (New York Times, July 31, 2007).
- [Senator McCain Calls for Epilepsy Awareness](#) (Epilepsy Foundation Web site).
- [Seniors and Seizures, overview of Epilepsy Foundation's rapidly growing senior initiative.](#)
- **The Epilepsy Index**, an educational Web resource for general epilepsy information. www.epilepsyfoundation.org/answerplace/index.cfm.

Suggested Interview Questions

- Is misdiagnosis common with regard to epilepsy?
- What causes seizures and can they be prevented?
- If someone experiences a seizure what should be done? What is correct seizure first aid?
- What treatment options are available to people with epilepsy?
- What is the prognosis for someone with epilepsy?

Fast Facts

- More than 300,000 of the more than 3 million Americans who have some form of epilepsy are seniors aged 65 or older.
- Epilepsy can affect anyone of any background at any time, but it does strike the very young and the very old at a disproportionately higher pace.
- Epilepsy is a generic term used to define a family of seizure disorders. A person with recurring seizures is said to have epilepsy.
- A seizure is a brief disturbance of electrical activity in the brain. Twenty-five million Americans (one in every ten) have had, or will have, a seizure at some point in their lives.

Interview Opportunities

- Eric Hargis, president and CEO, the Epilepsy Foundation
- Page Pennell, MD, Professional Advisory Board, the Epilepsy Foundation
- Senior living with epilepsy

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.