

Story Idea: *Video Games, TV, Flashing Lights and Epilepsy*

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Retail video game sales have hovered around the \$10 billion mark for the past several years with no end in sight. In fact, video games and the related equipment are among the most popular gifts for children and teens—and when these pre-adults aren't playing games, they're often watching TV or working and/or playing on computers.

Meanwhile, some of these very same children have an undiagnosed or unrecognized condition just waiting to rear its ugly head. The condition is called photosensitivity and it can lead children to have visually provoked seizures during game play.

Although, no one knows how many people have had seizures while watching television, surfing the Internet, or playing video games, some epileptologists (doctors who treat seizures) have noticed an increase in the number of young people coming to them following such behaviors, especially since they are bound to keep increasing in the years to come.

Story Resources

- [Cartoon-based illness mystifies Japan](#) (CNN)
- [Girl Has Seizure After 5 Hours Of Video Gaming](#) (WTAE-TV 4, Pittsburgh)
- *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*)
- **The Epilepsy Index**, an educational Web resource for general epilepsy information, www.epilepsyfoundation.org/answerplace/index.cfm.

Suggested Interview Questions

- What can cause the onset of a photosensitive seizure?
- 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 to photosensitive epilepsy?
- 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.