

## Story Idea: *Women and Epilepsy*

**Contact:** Kimberli Meadows, 301-918-3747, [kmeadows@efa.org](mailto:kmeadows@efa.org)

With all the news these days about pregnancy, fertilization methods, abortions, birth defects and other reproduction issues, isn't it amazing that you never hear anything about a condition that affects one out of every hundred women and has tremendous risk of affecting their pregnancies?

The condition is epilepsy, and it affects more than one million women and girls in the U.S. alone. Untreated epilepsy can be devastating for mothers, children and fetuses, as can be the side effects from antiepileptic drugs (AEDs). These side effects can include:

- Excessive weight gain
- Sexual dysfunction
- Menstrual difficulties
- Birth defects (including spina bifida, among many others)

Women must become more aware about epilepsy and seizure disorders so they can make better informed decisions about birth control, medical treatment and safer AEDs, so they can lead successful and fulfilling lives.

### Story Resources

- **Women & Epilepsy Information Kit**, which contains up-to-date materials for women with epilepsy and their health care providers.
- **Brochures** (*available in both English and Spanish*):
  - a) *Women & Epilepsy*
  - b) *Pregnancy & Epilepsy*
- **The Epilepsy Index**, an educational Web resource for general epilepsy information, [www.epilepsyfoundation.org/answerplace/index.cfm](http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org/answerplace/index.cfm).

### Suggested Interview Questions

- Can medication or seizures affect sexual function among women?
- Why are women with epilepsy more likely to have fertility problems?
- Can specific medications for epilepsy affect unborn children?
- Can anything be done to minimize the risk of birth defects?
- Is it necessary to continue medication while pregnant?
- Are OB/GYNs equipped to treat the special needs of pregnant women with epilepsy?

## **Fast Facts**

- Epilepsy affects more than one million women and girls in the United States—more than three million American in all.
- Despite the fact that half the people who have epilepsy are women, practically all the research on this condition has involved men, which means that patient care is compromised.
- Many women with epilepsy experience an increase in seizure activity related to their menstrual cycles (called catamenial epilepsy). Women may have more seizures during ovulation, or before the onset of menstruation.
- Estrogen can excite brain cells and increase the risk of seizure activity, while progesterone tends to inhibit the brain cell activity, and may help prevent seizures.

## **Interview Opportunities**

- Eric Hargis, president and CEO, the Epilepsy Foundation.
- Physician specialist.
- Denise Pease, Foundation Board Member, African-American woman 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](http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org).