

Epilepsy in the Workplace

When Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act, most of us thought curb-cuts and handicapped restrooms were privileges for “the disabled”. Today we all use them and acknowledge that they make life easier. When you apply this logic to the workplace, it’s easy to see that most adjustments for individuals with seizure disorders benefit all employees.

Written Orientation and Training for All Employees

This universal practice is also helpful for individuals with learning or memory issues. Stress and fatigue can make it difficult to remember complicated procedures. Allow individuals to study training materials at home if necessary.

Write down common office routines and equipment instructions. It helps orient new employees with minimal time from supervisors and serves as a hand reference for others.

Allow employees to use whatever supports they need to be effective at work. This includes job coaches, written work-plans and task checklists.

Consistent Communication and Feedback on Job Performance

If there is little feedback on specific workplace issues, employees may assume a negative evaluation is related to their protected class status or disability.

Early intervention with performance issues reduces frustration on the part of both the supervisor and the employee and allows both to make adjustments as needed.

Follow up verbal feedback with confirmation in writing so that the employee understands your specific work requests. Give work requests in writing whenever possible.

Flexible Scheduling

Many non-drivers rely on public transportation to get to work – consider this in scheduling work tasks. Many suburban bus routes do not run during the day or late at night.

For someone with mid-day fatigue, allow the person to come in earlier, take a real break at lunch, and leave later in the day. Accommodate medical appointments.

Sleep deprivation is a common seizure trigger for individuals with epilepsy. Avoid scheduling rotating shifts for these employees.

Workplace Technology

Day-Timers and Franklin Planners are the original Memory Notebooks – This practice started as an accommodation for people with memory issues and is now universal.

Auditory cues such as appointment alarms on Palm-Pilots and computers, alarm watches help everyone make it to meetings on time.

Use name tents or tags for all routine meetings that include more than seven people.

Health Care Confidentiality

Individuals have the right to choose how and when to share information about their health. If a person's seizures are well controlled he or she might not disclose it.

*Anne Barnwell
People Incorporated Epilepsy Services*