

SEE YOUR DOCTOR

Caring For A Loved One With Involuntary Emotions

(NAPSA)—Rebecca and her family were in a terrible car accident during their family vacation more than 10 years ago, and Rebecca suffered a traumatic brain injury. Although she has made significant steps toward recovery, Rebecca experiences episodes of involuntary emotion as a result of her injury. Often in public settings, Rebecca loudly laughs or cries, displaying emotions that are inappropriate to the situation.

Rebecca is an example of more than 1 million Americans who suffer from involuntary emotional expression disorder (IEED). IEED is also known by other names such as pseudobulbar affect, emotional lability, pathological laughing and crying, and emotional incontinence.

IEED is a distinct neurologic disorder that causes sudden and unpredictable episodes of crying, laughing or other emotional displays. IEED may occur when disease or injury damages the area of the brain that controls normal expression of emotion. This damage can disrupt brain signaling, causing a “short circuit” and triggering episodes of involuntary emotional expression. The condition can occur in people diagnosed with neurologic disease or brain injury such as multiple sclerosis (MS), Lou Gehrig’s disease (ALS), Parkinson’s disease, dementias (including Alzheimer’s disease), stroke and traumatic brain injury.

IEED can cause anxiety and embarrassment for both Rebecca and her family, particularly in social situations. These episodes of involuntary emotions can be so disruptive that Rebecca—and others affected by the condition—may avoid going out into public or social settings and become isolated over time.

Caring and Understanding

The best approach to caring for someone with IEED is to talk openly about the condition and the emotional episodes it causes. Reassure your loved one that there is nothing to be embarrassed about. Let him or her know that you are not embarrassed and that you understand these episodes cannot be controlled. Also, let him or her know that you will help manage



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any disruptions that an episode may cause. To avoid confusion and hurt feelings, it is best to have open lines of communication about your loved one’s episodes with friends and family members.

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“You and the person you care for should learn as much as possible about IEED. Information helps you feel more in control, and gaining knowledge about IEED will help ensure that your friend or family member receives the best possible care,” explains Erik Pioro, M.D., Ph.D., Director, Center for ALS and Related Disorders, Department of Neurology, Cleveland Clinic. “IEED has a significant impact on the quality of life and relationships for patients, their loved ones and caregivers.”

Finding Support

Even though it can be difficult to care for someone with IEED, take a moment each day to enjoy the time you are able to spend with him or her. But remember to also take care of yourself both physically and mentally; it is essential that you balance your own needs with those of your loved one. According to the National Family Caregivers Association (NFCA), caregivers in such situations often need to—and should—find support and help by joining a support group and learning from other caregivers.

For additional information, call (866) 740-4333 or visit www.IEED.org or the NFCA Web site at www.thefamilycaregiver.org.