



spotlight on health

Epilepsy: A Growing Health Concern Among Older Adults

(NAPSA)—About two million people in the United States live with a medical problem that is not easily accepted or understood—epilepsy, also referred to as a seizure disorder. While more widely known as a childhood condition, epilepsy can begin at any point in life, including 50 years of age and older.

“For older adults, epilepsy can pose special problems because they are prone to other medical disorders with symptoms that may mimic seizures,” says Orrin Devinsky, M.D., director of the Comprehensive Epilepsy Centers at New York University and Mount Sinai and author of the new book, *Epilepsy: Patient & Family Guide*. “As a result, seizure disorders in this population may go undetected, misdiagnosed or improperly treated.”

Causes of epilepsy in older adults include stroke, heart attacks, Alzheimer’s disease, or brain tumors. A person who has had two or more seizures is usually diagnosed with epilepsy. Symptoms of a seizure can range from a blank stare lasting a few seconds, where the patient quickly returns to normal, to a full-body jerking motion that renders the patient disoriented and exhausted.

Newer Treatments Offer More Options

Once diagnosed with epilepsy,



Symptoms of epilepsy in older adults often mimic other maladies. Epilepsy must be properly diagnosed and medicated.

older adults often have to contend with side effects from certain antiepilepsy drugs, which may include impaired thinking, loss of balance and sleepiness. These side effects are often confused by patients and medical professionals as signs of the aging process or other conditions. Problems may also occur from drug interactions between epilepsy medicines and other medicines older people may take for various medical conditions. Today, newer antiepilepsy medications offer patients more treatment options.

“For anyone with epilepsy, including an older adult, the goal of

treatment should be no seizures, no side effects,” says Dr. Devinsky. “One of my older patients seemed like he was falling asleep, when he was actually having seizures. The medication he was taking also made him feel sluggish. After switching him to a newer epilepsy drug, his seizures were controlled and he was back to his active lifestyle.”

Teaming Up With Your Doctor

The key to successful treatment, says Dr. Devinsky, is becoming educated about the condition and its treatment and working as a partner with your doctor. Dr. Devinsky’s new book is aimed at helping patients and family members better understand epilepsy and giving them accurate information that will remove the fears often fueled by misconceptions and misinformation.

“Epilepsy spares no age group and presents different challenges at various stages of one’s life,” says Dr. Devinsky. “But, with the proper diagnosis and appropriate treatment, people with epilepsy can live fulfilling, active lives.”

To obtain a copy of the book, *Epilepsy: Patient & Family Guide* (publisher: F.A. Davis Company), visit Amazon.com or a local bookstore. A portion of the book proceeds will be donated to the Epilepsy Foundation (www.epilepsyfoundation.org).