

Myths & Misconceptions

The communities of South-East Asia continue to perpetuate many myths and misconceptions about epilepsy, passed on from generation to generation. These deprive patients of bonafide treatment and prove extremely detrimental not only to them but also to their families and community.

Myth:

Epilepsy is due to incarceration with evil spirits. Take the person to a sorcerer and have these spirits exorcised.

Fact:

Epilepsy is a medical disease. It is now easy to treat with modern medication. Under no circumstances should patients be taken to sorcerers or faith healers.

Myth:

These patients are possessed by God. They should be worshipped.

Fact:

Patients behave in an uncontrollable manner during an epileptic seizure, but this is not an expression of supernatural powers. They should be given medical treatment and treated like any other human being.

Myth:

Never touch a patient having a seizure. The disease will be passed on to you.

Fact:

The patient having a seizure needs your help and should be given appropriate care. Epilepsy cannot be passed on to others by touching the patient.

Myth:

Having a person in the family with epilepsy is a stigma, so this fact should be concealed.

Fact:

Unfortunately, the stigma against people with epilepsy and their families continues to be widely prevalent. Every effort should be made to remove this stigma through education.

Myth:

Epilepsy is a form of madness, so it should be treated in a lunatic asylum.

Fact:

Epilepsy is a disease of the brain, so it should be treated by physicians, neurologists or psychiatrists.



Myth:

Children with epilepsy are dull and cannot learn, so they should not be sent to school.

Fact:

Children with epilepsy can be extremely intelligent. There are many examples of high achievers in history who have had epilepsy. Usually it is the stigma against epilepsy which prevents parents from sending their children to school, to learn and achieve their full potential.

Myth:

Women with epilepsy can never have children, so they should not get married.

Fact:

Most women with epilepsy can safely have children, with no adverse effects on the baby. Marriage of women with epilepsy is a delicate and sensitive issue and should be handled appropriately. There is certainly no bar against their getting married.

Myth:

A seizure can be terminated by putting a key in the patient's hand or by making the patient smell onions or a dirty shoe.

Fact:

None of these non-medical measures are of any use. Family members and teachers should be made aware of first-aid measures required during a seizure.

Myth:

Marriage will cure epilepsy.

Fact:

This misconception is widely prevalent in some villages of north-eastern Thailand and South India. It is certainly not true and it is undesirable for a person with epilepsy to marry without the proper consent and knowledge of the partner.

These myths and misconceptions can only be dispelled by proper education of patients, families, communities and policy-makers. We all have a role to play in dispelling these myths, removing stigma and helping patients and their families to lead a normal life.