



A Self-Help Guide to Non-Epileptic Attack Disorder for Teens



Developed by Dr Gemma Johns
Paediatric Psychology Service

Index

Introduction	Page 1
About non-epileptic attacks	Page 1 – 8
Getting started with goal setting and building motivation	Page 9
Understanding your triggers	Page 10
Managing stress and anxiety: the basics	Page 11 – 13
Skills to help you manage stress and anxiety	Page 14-17
Other top tips	Page 18
How family and friends can help	Page 18 – 19
Putting it all together	Page 19 – 20
Additional resource	Page 21 - 26

Introduction

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for young people who have been diagnosed with non-epileptic attack disorder (NEAD), and their families. It includes information, ideas and techniques to help you manage your non-epileptic attacks.

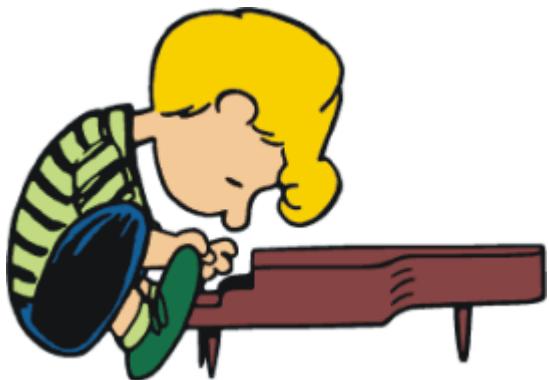


The aims of this guide are to:

- Help you to understand your attacks
- Learn what triggers them
- Understand what makes them better or worse
- Develop skills to manage them
- Learn how to live well with the condition

How to use this guide

This guide will teach you skills to manage your condition. But, like any other new skills, it is important to practise what you learn. Imagine you were learning to play the piano. Could you learn just by reading a book? No! You would need to practice, practice, practice. Just reading this guide won't be enough either. Just like learning to play the piano, these new skills require lots of practice too.



About non-epileptic attacks

What are some other names for non-epileptic attacks?

There are lots of different names for non-epileptic attacks, which can be very confusing! Here are some of the most common ones you might hear:

Non-epileptic seizures

Dissociative seizures

Pseudo-seizures

Psychogenic non epileptic seizures

Psychosomatic seizures

Somatisation

Functional seizures

Conversion seizures

In this guide we will stick to non-epileptic attacks or non-epileptic attack disorder (NEAD). You can use whichever term you prefer.

What does a non-epileptic attack look and feel like?

When people have a non-epileptic attack they experience sudden changes in what they can see, hear, and feel, and in their ability to control their body. Other people might notice changes in the person's behaviour. Some people are completely unaware during the seizure, whereas others are aware of what is happening but are unable to respond.



Below are some common symptoms. Tick the ones you experience and note down any others you've noticed:

Fainting	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tiredness	<input type="checkbox"/>	Stomach pain	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blacking out	<input type="checkbox"/>	Racing heart	<input type="checkbox"/>	Blurred vision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shaking	<input type="checkbox"/>	Weakness	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dizziness	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling distant	<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty speaking	<input type="checkbox"/>	Headache	<input type="checkbox"/>
Going blank	<input type="checkbox"/>	Confusion	<input type="checkbox"/>	Unable to respond	<input type="checkbox"/>
Memory problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	Jerking limbs	<input type="checkbox"/>	Feeling distant	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other symptoms I've noticed _____

Some people have warning signs, such as sudden feelings of panic, sensations in the body, or feeling distant from themselves. Make a note of any warning signs you've noticed below:

My warning signs are _____

After an attack, you might feel tired, forgetful, or notice changes in how you feel emotionally or in your body.

After an attack, I feel _____

What's the difference between epileptic and non-epileptic seizures?



Non-epileptic attacks look like epileptic seizures but there are important differences. Epileptic seizures are caused by sudden electrical activity in the brain, which causes the changes in a person's experience and behaviour during the seizure. Although non-epileptic attacks look very similar to epileptic seizures they have a different cause and there are no abnormal electrical signals.

Some people have both epileptic and non-epileptic seizures. Your doctor will tell you which type you have.

How many people have non-epileptic attacks?

Most people haven't heard about non epileptic attacks, but they aren't actually rare. For every 1000,000 adults, between 15 and 30 have NEAD. We are not sure how common non-epileptic attack disorder is in younger people, but it is probably similar to adults.



Can they get better?

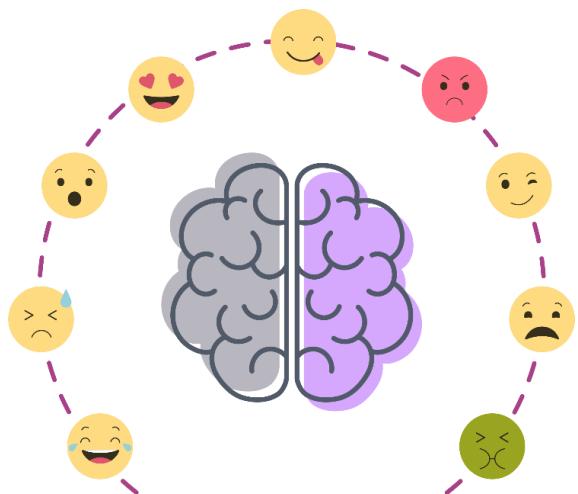
Yes, young people with NEAD can fully recover and lead normal lives. Children and young people with NEAD are more likely to become seizure free compared with adults with NEAD.



Non-epileptic attacks often get better when the young person and their family learn about what they are, what might have caused them, and what might be keeping them going. However, some young people may need some extra help to get better.

Why do they happen?

Non-epileptic attacks are the brain's response to potentially threatening triggers that can come from inside or outside the body. Inside triggers include thoughts, memories, emotions or bodily sensations. Outside triggers include situations, objects, sounds or smells which remind the brain of a difficult moment in the past. Sometimes this happens when people feel stressed. However, it can also happen when feeling calm and relaxed.



It can be difficult to believe that something as frightening as a non-epileptic attack is not caused by something that would show on a brain scan. However, we know that thoughts and emotions can create strong physical reactions in the body. For example, we might blush when we feel embarrassed, notice our heart racing before an exam, feel butterflies while talking to someone we like, or need to rush to the loo when we feel nervous! Non-epileptic attacks are a way that your body responds when things feel too stressful or difficult to manage.

It is important to remember:

- They are not made up or done on purpose
- They are not your fault
- They are not a type of epilepsy
- They can have a very big impact on your life
- They can be very difficult to control

Why am I having them?

There is no single cause of NEAD. You may have read or been told that non-epileptic attacks are caused by an upsetting experience in the past. However, lots of young people with NEAD develop symptoms without having experienced an event that fits this description. School is often a big source of stress for young people with NEAD.



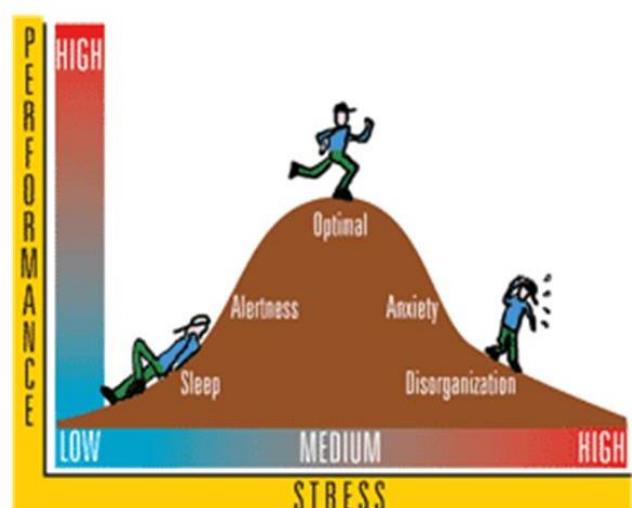
Other stressful situations include: bullying; family problems; arguments; loss of a family member or friend; illness or injury. Once the attacks start they can become a 'reflex', which means they can happen automatically in situations that have little to do with the reason they started in the first place. You can get 'stuck' in a vicious cycle of:
stress → attacks → more stress → more attacks

While it may never be possible to know exactly what first caused your non epileptic attacks, you can learn about the things that keep them going and learn skills to help you to break the cycle.

How does stress play a role?

We all feel stress in our daily life, and some stress can actually be good for us. If we had no stress whatsoever, we might not ever feel motivated to get things done. But too much stress can make us feel overwhelmed and unproductive.

When we are within our 'window of tolerance', or what we will refer to here as our 'green zone' (see below), we feel able to cope with life's challenges without too much difficulty. We can manage our emotions, focus our attention and problem solve effectively. People with NEAD are best able to cope with stress and triggers at these times. BUT – our ability to cope is reduced when our 'green zone' gets smaller.





Red Zone

This is where you feel extremely anxious, angry or out of control. You might feel overwhelmed and feel like you want to fight or run away

Orange Zone

This is where you start to feel agitated, anxious, or angry. You don't feel out of control but you also don't feel comfortable.

Green Zone

(aka the 'window of tolerance')

This is where you feel just right, where you are best able to cope with life's challenges.

You're calm but not tired, alert but not anxious.

Orange Zone

This is where you begin to feel like you're shutting down, you may feel spaced out, sluggish, or lose track of time. You don't feel out of control but you also don't feel comfortable.

Blue Zone

This is where you feel extremely zoned out and numb, emotionally and physically. Time can go missing and it might feel like you're frozen. It's not something you choose, your body takes over.

Too much stress can make our green zone smaller and push us towards the blue zone or the red zone. Being in the red or blue zone is more likely to trigger an attack. If we can increase the amount of stress we are able to cope with, we increase our 'green zone' and can reduce some of the attacks that happen by when we pushed into the blue and red zones.

What is the fight, flight, freeze response, and why does it matter?

We all feel anxious or panicky from time to time. This is a normal part of life. Stressful situations like exams, public speaking and going to a hospital appointment can trigger anxious thoughts, emotions and bodily sensations. Typical bodily sensations include: racing heart; breathing more quickly; tense muscles; feeling hot and sweaty; feeling dizzy or sick.

These feelings are caused by our bodies going into a 'fight, flight or freeze' mode. As humans our bodies have evolved over time to help us survive dangerous and life-threatening situations (like being chased by a bear!). When our body thinks that we are in a danger, it releases chemicals like adrenalin and cortisol which trigger these changes to help us get ready to react to what might happen. These changes prepare us to either fight off the threat, or escape. Some people might freeze or flop (faint) instead. While these responses are helpful in protecting us from real danger, they can become unhelpful if they start happening too often, and in response to things that aren't a 'real' threat, in the here and now.



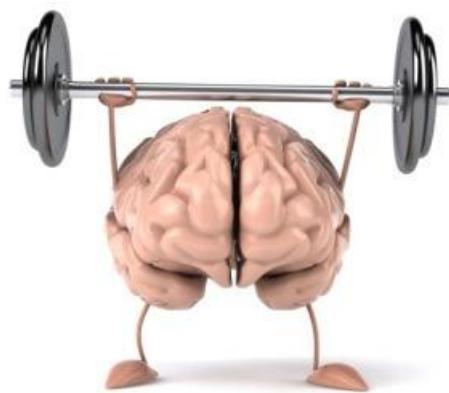
We also share this fight, flight, freeze response with animals. The freeze or flop response can have huge benefits for an animal that is cornered by a predator, with no other means of escape. Follow the link below to watch a YouTube video which shows the freeze response in action. As you are watching, try to pick out some of the common symptoms noted above. What might have happened if the animal had responded with fight or flight, rather than freeze? Do you think it would have survived?

YouTube: Impala in and slowly out of collapsed immobility <https://tinyurl.com/y6d4a5s6>

As you can see from the video, the freeze response can be a very effective survival mechanism. Non epileptic attacks are our stress response in action, they are our body's attempt to keep us safe, but can become a problem when they happen too much and at unhelpful times.

What can I do about all this?

Non-epileptic attacks are something that the brain has learned to do. There is no medication for non-epileptic attacks. However, you can identify which triggers are likely to cause them and learn to spot the first signs of an attack so you can stop it from happening. Some people can learn to manage their attacks by adjusting their breathing or changing the focus of their attention. Reducing stress can also help. All of these things help the brain to 'unlearn' non-epileptic attacks and break the vicious cycle.



Getting Started

Goal setting

Making changes can be hard. Setting goals can keep us on track and help us to measure our progress. Take a moment to think about what you would like to be different in your life. Think about **where** you would be going, **what** you would be doing and **who** you would be with. E.g. "I would be going into town on the bus, on my own, to meet my friends."

My goals:

Building motivation

It can also be helpful to think about **why** we want to make changes. Take a moment to read the statements below and mark a cross on each line to show where you are on the scale.

How much impact are my attacks having on my life at the moment?

Not at all	0	50	100 Affects everything
------------	---	----	------------------------

How important is it for me to reach my goals?

Not at all	0	50	100 Totally important
------------	---	----	-----------------------

How willing am I to set aside time to get better?

Not at all	0	50	100 Totally willing
------------	---	----	---------------------

How much of a priority is getting better for me at the moment?

Not at all	0	50	100 Complete priority
------------	---	----	-----------------------

Understanding your triggers

Discover your triggers

Triggers can differ from person to person so it's important to work out what your personal patterns are. Knowing your personal triggers can help you to develop more effective coping strategies to manage your non-epileptic attacks.

Even if you already know some of your triggers, it can be really helpful to keep a diary for a few weeks. This can help you to see patterns and identify other triggers. Sometimes attacks seem to happen out of the nowhere, like when you are sat quietly watching a film. If you keep a diary you might see patterns that you would otherwise miss. For example, you might notice you had a seizure the day after an argument, or following a night or poor sleep.



Use the worksheet at the end of this workbook to keep a log over the next week or two. You only need to write a little bit in each box, but make sure to write enough to jog your memory. For example, write "argued with Sam at dinner time" rather than "dinner" or "read a good book in bed" rather than just "bed". You should record what you did, your mood ratings (one a scale of 1-10), and when you had a non-epileptic attack. There is also space to record information about your sleep.

Once you have recorded the information for a week or two, take some time to review your notes and make a note of any triggers or patterns you notice below. Make a note of any things that make your attacks worse (i.e. trigger an attack, or make one more likely). Also note down any things that which make them better, or less likely to happen:

My personal triggers and patterns:

Managing stress and anxiety: the basics

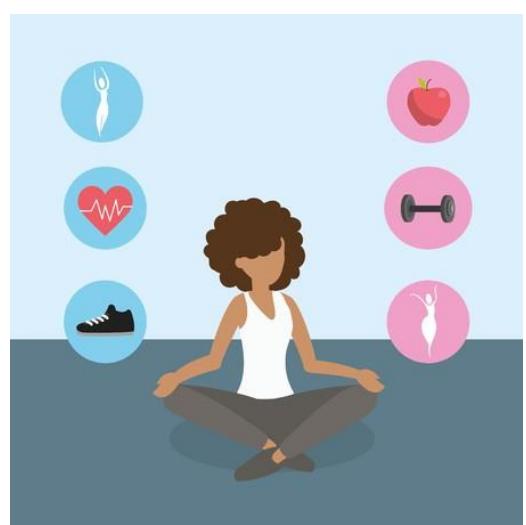
Diet

Food is fuel for our brain and body. When we are lacking in fuel, we can have difficulties concentrating and controlling our mood and emotions. This can increase our stress and the likelihood of an attack. Keeping your body and brain well fuelled means sticking to a regular eating pattern and choosing the right 'fuel'. It can be helpful to remember "rubbish in, rubbish out" when thinking about what you choose to eat. A nutritious and regular eating pattern can reduce stress, make it easier to cope with attacks and reduce the number you have.



Here are some tips for maintaining a healthy diet:

- Eat at regular times throughout the day
- Keep the same pattern of meals from day to day (e.g. breakfast, lunch and evening meals, plus 2 snacks)
- Avoid long gaps between meals (i.e. more than 3-4 hours between meals or snacks)
- Avoid 'fad' diets, fasting or comfort eating
- If you have trouble remembering to eat regularly, try setting an alarm to signal meal/snack time
- Eat a wide variety of foods to ensure you are getting a variety of nutrients.
- Aim for at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day.



Exercise

We all know exercise is good for us, but sometimes it's worth reminding ourselves why....

Regular exercise can:

- Boost your mood, relax your muscles, reduce stress and improve sleep.
- Improve heart and lung function
- Strengthens our muscles and bones.
- Helps us to maintain a healthy weight
- Improves self-confidence and social skills.

Young people should aim for, on average, at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity a day. This should be a combination of aerobic exercise and exercise to strengthen muscles and bones.

Moderate intensity activities will raise your heart rate, and make you breathe faster and feel warmer. One way to tell if you're working at a moderate intensity level is if you can still talk, but not sing.

To get started on becoming more active, try to find an activity you can do regularly. It's important to do something you enjoy, or it will be hard to keep it up. Some examples to get you started....

- Walking (e.g. walking to school, college or work; walking the dog)
- Jogging or running
- Team sports (e.g. football, rugby, basketball, netball, hockey)
- Classes, in person or online (e.g. dance, aerobics, gymnastics, yoga, martial arts)
- Gym, home-based or paid membership (e.g. resistance exercises with exercise bands, weight machines or free weights, sit-ups, press-ups, skipping with a rope)
- Other active hobbies (e.g. rock climbing, horse riding, rollerblading, ice skating, surfing, skateboarding, tennis, badminton)

Sleep

Sleep problems are common. The 'right' amount of sleep varies from person to person and our sleep needs can change throughout our lives. Lots of things can affect sleep, including: age, health conditions, mood, the bedroom environment and our routine. Many people with non-epileptic attacks say they sleep badly. Poor sleep can increase our feelings of stress which might mean we are more likely to have an attack. We can get 'stuck' in a cycle of poor sleep, increased stress, more attacks, more stress, worse sleep.



There are lots of ways to break the cycle and get better sleep. This can reduce stress and makes it easier to cope with the attacks that you do have, and may also reduce the number of attacks you have overall. Here are some top dos and don'ts:

Sleep 'Don'ts'	Sleep 'Dos'
Staying in bed when you are not able to sleep. This creates a negative association with being in bed and being awake.	If you're not asleep after 20-30mins (without watching the clock), get up and do something relaxing and not too exciting, such as reading a book. Get back into bed as soon as you feel sleepy again. If you can, avoid studying, chatting to friends, watching tv and other waking activities while in bed. Try using a desk or beanbag area instead.
Going to sleep and waking up at different times each day.	Try to stick to a regular bed time and waking up time, this works best if you stick to it at weekends as well.
Lack of bedtime routine to 'signpost' to our brain that it's time for sleep. E.g. studying, video calling friends, or playing computer games until late, then expecting to fall asleep straight after.	Create a regular night-time routine to signal to your brain and body that it's time to wind down. Try to include routine (e.g. pyjamas on, teeth brushed) and relaxing activities (e.g. bath, reading, drawing, listening to relaxing music etc.) in the hour before bed.

Bedroom environment e.g., uncomfortable bed, messy room, too hot, too light etc.	Try to make sure you have a comfortable mattress, keep the room clean and uncluttered, cool and dark (black out curtains or blinds can help), keep pets out of the bed with you. Your bedroom should be a relaxing, cosy and inviting place to sleep!
Too much blue light (from computers, phones, TV) interferes with melatonin, which we need to make us feel sleepy.	Avoid blue light from electronic devices for at least one hour before bed (i.e. no laptops, tablets, phones or TV). Use 'night mode' or 'blue light filter' from early evening.
Day time napping	Avoid napping. If you really have to make sure you don't nap for longer than 45 minutes.
Stress and worries	Talk through worries with friends and family, write them down and/or go through them in 'worry time' earlier in the day.
Watching the clock	Turn your alarm clock to face the other way. Move your phone out of arm's reach so you're not tempted to check the time.
Being inactive	Get enough regular exercise (see below). This helps you to feel naturally tired.
Not getting enough daylight	Try to get out in daylight every day, to set your body clock. Then keep your room relaxed and dim before bed.
Eating too late at night	Don't go to bed hungry but don't eat too late. Leave 2 hours between food and bed. If you do eat, choose something light and easily digested.
Too much caffeine. Caffeine is a stimulant which will keep you awake.	Keep caffeinated drinks to morning only.
Smoking, alcohol, drugs.	All of these affect the quality and quantity of sleep. Avoid or reduce.
Pain, hormonal changes, (e.g., menstrual cycle), snoring.	See your GP if pain, hormonal issues or snoring affects your sleep.

One thing I'd like to try to improve my **diet** is...

One thing I'd like to try to improve my **exercise** is...

One thing I'd like to try to improve my **sleep** is...

Skills to help you manage stress and anxiety

Behavioural Activation

When we feel anxious or low we can stop doing things we need or want to do. This might be because we are worried about having an attack, or because we have lost interest because we feel sad or overwhelmed. We might stop going out, seeing friends and family, or doing the things we used to enjoy. When we stop doing these things, we miss out on a sense of achievement and enjoyment, and it can start to impact on our self-confidence.

This can make us feel even more anxious and low, which in turn makes us more likely to have a non-epileptic attack. We can get stuck in a vicious cycle.

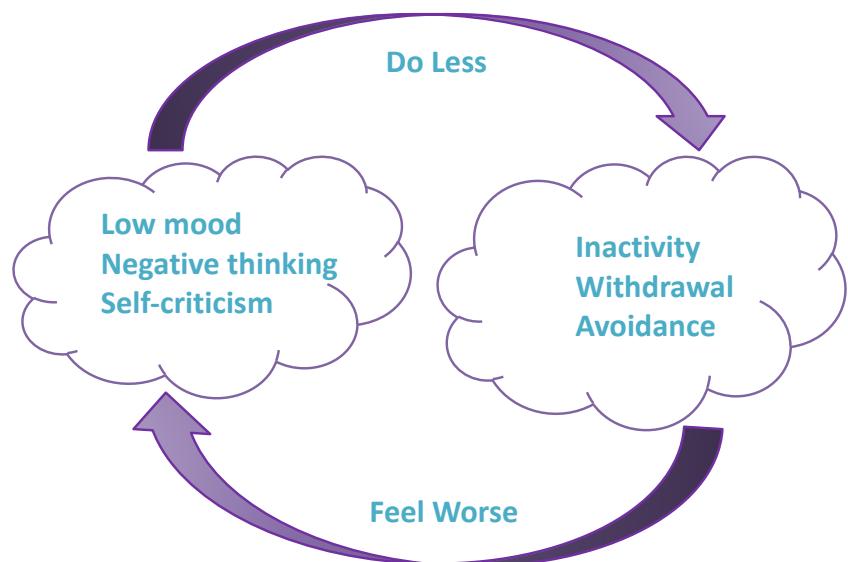
To break this vicious cycle, we can start to do more of the things we've stopped doing. Use the **Activity Selection** worksheet at the back of this guide to help you select some activities. Then use the **Behavioural Activation Schedule** to plan the activities you'd like to try in the coming week.

Remember to...

Plan it – it's really important to plan your week in advance, by writing down what you intend to do. Research shows that we are more likely to do something when it's written down.

Do it – follow the plan, put it somewhere you will see it. Don't wait to *feel* motivated. Motivation comes after action.

Review it – how did it go? What went well? What stopped you from following the plan (if anything?). You might also find it helpful to track your mood rating through the week.



Becoming more active has lots of positives, including:

- Fun and enjoyment
- Focusing your thoughts in the here and now
- Feeling more in control and confident, and less stressed and overwhelmed
- A sense of achievement, the more we do the more motivated we feel

Progressive muscle relaxation



Muscle tension is common when we are feeling stressed. It is part of the fight or flight response, our body is getting ready to 'spring' into action. Fidgeting, fiddling, tapping, clenching, grinding your teeth, and hunching your shoulders can all be signs of tension related to stress. Feeling on edge, wound up or easily startled can also be signs.

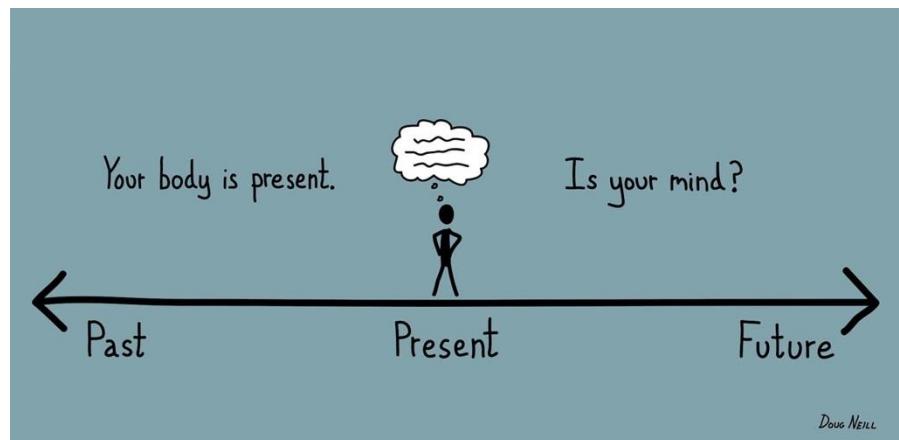
We often don't notice quite how tense we are, so becoming more aware of our body can be helpful. With practice, you will become more aware of when

you are feeling tense and you will have the skills to help you relax. Regular muscle relaxation can help to reduce stress and can improve sleep.

To give it a try, follow the **progressive muscle relaxation script** at the end of this workbook. You might find it easier to ask someone to read it to you, or record yourself and play it back. Alternatively, there are lots of progressive muscle relaxation audio guides that you can search for online. During this exercise, each muscle should be tensed, but not to the point of strain. If you have any injuries or pain, you can skip those areas. Pay special attention to the feeling of releasing tension in each muscle and the resulting feeling of relaxation.

Mindfulness

When we feel low in mood, our mind can become focussed on the past, going over and over past events, or things that we've said and done. When we are anxious, we tend to be living in the future, we can get caught up with "what ifs...?", worrying about what could or might happen.



Mindfulness is a state of non-judgemental awareness of what's happening in the here and now. It's awareness of our thoughts, feelings, and senses.

The goal of mindfulness is not to stop thinking or get rid of unwanted thoughts or feelings. Instead, the aim is to practice *noticing* and *accepting* whatever comes up, in the present moment, without getting drawn into further judgment or analysis.

There are lots of proven benefits to mindfulness, but it's hard to be mindful without practice. Try the exercises below. There is a full list of **mindfulness exercises** in the back of this workbook. There are also lots of apps and audio guides that you can use to help you practice.

Drop Anchor



1. Plant your feet into the floor.
2. Push them down—notice the floor beneath you, supporting you.
3. Notice the muscle tension in your legs as you push your feet down.
4. Notice your entire body—and the feeling of gravity flowing down through your head, spine, and legs into your feet.
5. Now look around and notice what you can see and hear around you. Notice where you are and what you're doing.

Mindfulness Walk

Start by noticing how your body moves and feels with each step. Then, expand your awareness to your surroundings. What do you see? Hear? Smell? Feel? You might notice the sound of the leaves crunching under your foot... the feel of the wind on your face... the changing colour of the trees... the sound of bird song in the distance.



Skills to help you manage your non-epileptic attacks

5-4-3-2-1 Sensory grounding

If you get a warning before your attacks you can try 'sensory grounding' to try to stop or delay the attack from happening. Sensory grounding involves using your senses to draw your attention back to the present moment and away from the non-epileptic attack. It is helpful to try to practise this when you are feeling well so that you can remember what to do when you feel an attack starting.

Sensory techniques can help you to ground in reality using your five senses, which can 'interrupt' the attack before it takes hold. To use this technique, follow these important steps:



Focus on your surroundings....

- 5** What are 5 things you can see? Look for small details such as a pattern on the ceiling, the way light reflects off a surface, or an object you have not noticed before.
- 4** What are 4 things you can feel? Notice the sensation of clothing on your body, the sun on your skin, or the feeling of the chair you are sitting in. Pick up an object and examine its weight, texture, and other physical qualities.
- 3** What are 3 things you can hear? Pay special attention to the sounds your mind has tuned out, such as a ticking clock, distant traffic, or trees blowing in the wind.
- 2** What are 2 things you can smell? Try to notice smells in the air around you, like an air freshener or freshly mowed grass. You may also look around for something that has a scent, such as a flower or an unlit candle.
- 1** What is 1 thing you can taste? Carry gum, sweets, or small snacks for this step. Pop one in your mouth and focus your attention closely on the flavours.

Now take some slow, deep breaths. Focus your attention on your breathing, before shifting your focus of attention onto something different....

Belly breathing

When we are stressed, afraid, or angry our breathing becomes quick, our heart beats faster and we are more likely to have strange feelings that can trigger an attack. One way to reduce attacks is to slow down your breathing. Belly breathing (also called diaphragmatic breathing) helps you to take slower, deeper breaths which can stop the attack. Learning to slow your breathing can help you to respond calmly in other situations too. Research shows this is a really useful skill to help manage stress. Try the steps below...



Put your hands on your tummy.
Pretend that your tummy is a balloon and you want to fill it as full as you can.
Breathe in slowly and see how big you can make your tummy.
Hold for a moment then slowly let the air out of the balloon.
Try not to let the air out too quickly. As you do, try counting slowly.
Try to gradually increase the number you count to on the in breath and on the out breath.

Practice belly breathing regularly at home, it is important to practice when you are feeling calm, once you are familiar with the technique you can use it at other times, when you notice you are starting to feel stressed or if you feel an attack is coming on.

Other top tips

- *Plan to take time out.* It may feel like there isn't time to take a break because there is so much to do. However, if you are feeling that things are getting out of control, making a plan with breaks can make you feel back in control and allow you to clear your mind and return to the task feeling refreshed.
- *Learn to say no.* It is ok to say no to things, particularly if you are feeling overwhelmed.
- *Keep connected.* Lots of people start to avoid situations because they fear having an attack. Unfortunately, attacks don't go away on their own and often become worse the more isolated and avoidant we become. So it's really important to keep seeing people and doing things that you enjoy.
- *Talk about your feelings,* rather than keeping them bottled up inside. Reach out to friends and family.
- *Ask for help.* You might find it helpful to show this guide to your family, friends and teachers. You can also speak to your doctor or staff at school about getting help.
- *Remember that non-epileptic attacks can be scary but they are not harmful*, and you have the skills to manage them!



How family and friends can help

During an attack

It is easier for you to get on with life as normal if the people around you don't fuss when you have a non-epileptic attack. Talk to friends and family about the information in this guide and what they should do if you have an attack.

Becoming more independent

Family and friends may feel anxious about your safety and encourage you to stop doing things they think might put you at risk. But not doing things that you used to can have a bad effect on your life and may make symptoms worse. Family and friends can help by encouraging you to do more, not doing things for you, and helping you to find ways of doing things that you've been avoiding. Explain it's important that you feel independent and in control of your life.



Supporting you to acknowledge and accept your feelings

Family and friends may try to protect you by stopping you from getting upset, either because they think this will cause an attack, or because they find it difficult to see you upset. But attacks can be linked to feelings that aren't expressed. Family and friends can encourage you to talk about your feelings by listening, trying to understand and allowing you to feel upset if you need to.



Take some pressures off you

It's important you take time for yourself. Friends and family can help by encouraging you to take time to relax and help you to plan enjoyable activities.

Putting it all together



Hopefully, from working through this guide, you now know:

1. What non-epileptic attacks are
2. Why they happen
3. What can cause them
4. What might be keeping them going

What next?

While it can be helpful to know what can cause non-epileptic attacks to happen in the first place, the most important thing is to understand what might be keeping them going in the here and now. By using the knowledge and skills you've learned from this guide, you can break the vicious cycle, and learn to cope with and reduce your attacks.

**WHAT
NEXT?**



What if this guide isn't enough?

There are lots of other people who can help you to learn more about NEAD and how to manage it. Speak to your family, school, GP, nurse specialist, or neurologist. If you feel you need more support than the information and techniques in this guide, you can ask to be referred to see a psychologist.

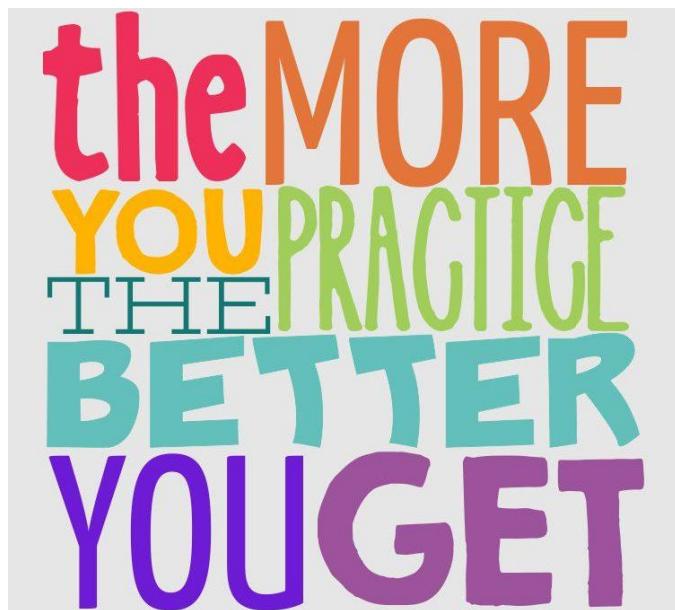
Make a note below of the names and contact details of the people you can contact if you need support:

My key contacts...

And finally...

Remember:

- There is no quick-fix and new skills can take time to work.
- But, changing even just one small thing can break the cycle and make a difference.
- Start with small changes and gradually build up to bigger ones.
- And, remember, just like playing the piano...



**You now have the knowledge and skills you need to
break the cycle-
good luck!**

Trigger Diary

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Sleep Bedtime last night							
Sleep quality e.g. good/ OK / poor							
Wake up time today							
Morning Record: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What you did• Mood rating• Non-epileptic attacks							
Afternoon Record: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What you did• Mood rating• Non-epileptic attacks							
Evening Record: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What you did• Mood rating• Non-epileptic attacks							

Mindfulness Exercises

Take Ten Breaths

1. Take ten slow, deep breaths. Focus on breathing out as slowly as possible until the lungs are completely empty—and then allow them to refill by themselves.
2. Notice the sensations of your lungs emptying. Notice them refilling. Notice your rib cage rising and falling. Notice the gentle rise and fall of your shoulders.
3. See if you can let your thoughts come and go as if they're just passing cars, driving past outside your house.
4. Expand your awareness: simultaneously notice your breathing and your body. Then look around the room and notice what you can see, hear, smell, touch, and feel.

Drop Anchor

1. Plant your feet into the floor.
2. Push them down—notice the floor beneath you, supporting you.
3. Notice the muscle tension in your legs as you push your feet down.
4. Notice your entire body—and the feeling of gravity flowing down through your head, spine, and legs into your feet.
5. Now look around and notice what you can see and hear around you. Notice where you are and what you're doing.

Mindfulness in Your Morning Routine

Pick an activity from your morning routine, like brushing your teeth or taking a shower. When you do it, totally focus your attention on what you're doing: the body movements, the taste, the touch, the smell, the sight, the sound, and so on. Notice what's happening with an attitude of openness and curiosity.

For example, when you're in the shower, notice the sounds of the water as it sprays out of the nozzle, as it hits your body, and as it gurgles down the drain. Notice the temperature of the water, and the feel of it in your hair, and on your shoulders, and running down your legs. Notice the smell of the soap and shampoo, and the feel of them against your skin. Notice the sight of the water droplets on the walls or shower curtain, the water dripping down your body and the steam rising upward. Notice the movements of your arms as you wash or scrub or shampoo.

When thoughts come up, acknowledge them, and let them come and go like passing cars. Again and again, you'll get caught up in your thoughts. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what the thought was that distracted you, and bring your attention back to the shower.

Mindfulness of Chores

Pick an activity such as washing dishes or vacuuming the floors—something mundane that you have to do to make your life work—and do it mindfully. For example, when ironing clothes, notice the colour and shape of the clothing, and the pattern made by the creases, and the new pattern as the creases disappear. Notice the hiss of the steam, the creak of the ironing board, the faint sound of the iron moving over the material. Notice the grip of your hand on the iron, and the movement of your arm and your shoulder.

If boredom or frustration arises, simply acknowledge it, and bring your attention back to the task at hand. When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to

what you're doing. Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to your current activity.

Mindfulness of Pleasant Activities

Pick an activity you enjoy such as cuddling with a loved one, eating lunch, stroking the cat, playing with the dog, walking in the park, listening to music, having a soothing hot bath, and so on. Do this activity mindfully: engage in it fully, using all five of your senses, and savour every moment. If and when your attention wanders, as soon as you realize it, note what distracted you, and re-engage in whatever you're doing.

https://thehappinesstrap.com/upimages/The_Complete_Happiness_Trap_Worksheets.pdf

These are some useful apps to help you to practice mindfulness and relaxed breathing:



Smiling Mind



Headspace



Calm



Stop, Breathe, Think

Progressive Muscle Relaxation Script

Sit back or lie down in a comfortable position. Shut your eyes if you're comfortable doing so. Begin by taking a deep breath and noticing the feeling of air filling your lungs. Hold your breath for a few seconds. (brief pause)

Release the breath slowly and let the tension leave your body. Take in another deep breath and hold it. (brief pause)

Again, slowly release the air. Even slower now, take another breath. Fill your lungs and hold the air. (brief pause)

Slowly release the breath and imagine the feeling of tension leaving your body. Now, move your attention to your feet. Begin to tense your feet by curling your toes and the arch of your foot. Hold onto the tension and notice what it feels like. (5 second pause)

Release the tension in your foot. Notice the new feeling of relaxation. Next, begin to focus on your lower leg. Tense the muscles in your calves. Hold them tightly and pay attention to the feeling of tension. (5 second pause)

Release the tension from your lower legs. Again, notice the feeling of relaxation. Remember to continue taking deep breaths. Next, tense the muscles of your upper leg and pelvis. You can do this by tightly squeezing your thighs together. Make sure you feel tenseness without going to the point of strain.

And release. Feel the tension leave your muscles. Begin to tense your stomach and chest. You can do this by sucking your stomach in. Squeeze harder and hold the tension. A little bit longer. (5 second pause)

Release the tension. Allow your body to go limp. Let yourself notice the feeling of relaxation. Continue taking deep breaths. Breathe in slowly, noticing the air fill your lungs, and hold it. (brief pause)

Release the air slowly. Feel it leaving your lungs. Next, tense the muscles in your back by bringing your shoulders together behind you. Hold them tightly. Tense them as hard as you can without straining and keep holding. (5 second pause)

Release the tension from your back. Feel the tension slowly leaving your body, and the new feeling of relaxation. Notice how different your body feels when you allow it to relax. Tense your arms all the way from your hands to your shoulders. Make a fist and squeeze all the way up your arm. Hold it. (5 second pause)

Release the tension from your arms and shoulders. Notice the feeling of relaxation in your fingers, hands, arms, and shoulders. Notice how your arms feel limp and at ease. Move up to your neck and your head. Tense your face and your neck by distorting the muscles around your eyes and mouth. (5 second pause)

Release the tension. Again, notice the new feeling of relaxation. Finally, tense your entire body. Tense your feet, legs, stomach, chest, arms, head, and neck. Tense harder, without straining. Hold the tension. (5 second pause)

Now release. Allow your whole body to go limp. Pay attention to the feeling of relaxation, and how different it is from the feeling of tension. Begin to wake your body up by slowly moving your muscles. Adjust your arms and legs. Stretch your muscles and open your eyes when you're ready.

From: <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/progressive-muscle-relaxation-script.pdf>

Behavioural Activation – Activity selection

- Make a list of some activities that are meaningful for you.
- Try to include a mix. Include: activities that are fun/ relaxing/ social; any routine activities that you have stopped doing; any important tasks that you've been putting off.
- For each activity, rate how difficult you think it would be to do. If lots of them feel difficult, try breaking them down.
- Choose some of the easier ones to include in your behavioural activation plan (next page). In the coming weeks, gradually increase your activity level, building up to the more difficult tasks.

Activity	Difficulty Rating (1 = easiest – 10 = hardest)

Behavioural Activation Schedule

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning							
Plan: What will you do?							
Review: Did you do it?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>						
Afternoon							
Plan: What will you do?							
Review: Did you do it?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>						
Evening							
Plan: What will you do?							
Review: Did you do it?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>						