

Georgia, 19

Nursing student who experienced her first seizure during her final high school exams, *SYDNEY*

Nursing student, Georgia, 19, Sydney experienced her first generalised seizure without any forewarning, two years ago. Less than a month later, she experienced another.

After her second seizure, Georgia was referred to an emergency neurologist, who organised an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) and an EEG (electroencephalogram) to investigate the issue. The test results armed Georgia with a diagnosis of epilepsy.

Both of her seizures occurred during Georgia's final high school exams, which led her neurologist to surmise they were triggered by stress.

Today, under the invaluable care and guidance of her neurologist, Georgia's epilepsy is well managed, and she is yet to experience a third seizure.

In February this year, for the first time post-diagnosis, Georgia's EEG was clear, and showed no signs of abnormal discharge.

Georgia remains positive about her future, and refuses to let the uncertainty of her next seizure prevent her from living life to the fullest. By publicly sharing her story on Purple Day®, Georgia hopes to shed further light on epilepsy and its impact on the lives of many Australians.

This is Georgia's story.

In 2017, at 17 years of age, Georgia experienced two seizures at home within the space of four weeks. Fortunately, Georgia was left injury free from both seizures, with the exception of minor cuts she sustained to her tongue.

After experiencing her second seizure, Georgia visited an emergency neurologist, who referred her for an EEG and MRI, which rendered her with a diagnosis of epilepsy.

Both seizures, which occurred when Georgia was studying for her High School Certificate (HSC) exams, were allegedly triggered by stress.

"After being diagnosed with epilepsy, I was granted special consideration for my HSC exams, to help minimise my stress, and ultimately, avoid triggering another seizure. I sat my exams in a room separate to my classmates and was allocated a maximum of one exam per day," said Georgia.

Only two months before experiencing her first seizure, Georgia had achieved a life milestone. She had secured her driver's licence – a ticket to a newfound sense of freedom. She was to be cruelly robbed of this independence however, when her licence was suspended following her epilepsy diagnosis.



"Initially, it was very difficult to be diagnosed with epilepsy. I had just received my provisional licence, which allowed me to drive around solo. Unfortunately, my diagnosis led to a two-year-long suspense of my licence, which I've only just recently got back," Georgia said.

Georgia has nothing but praise however, for both the education and health systems for catering to her specific requirements.

"My university is very accommodating. It offers special provision programs, should I require any additional assistance during exam periods. Given I'm studying nursing and practical placements form an important part of my course, when I had to give up my driver's licence, my university allowed me to request placements close to home," said Georgia.

For Georgia, the fear of uncertainty is one of the hardest aspects of living with epilepsy. She has therefore chosen to practice meditation and perform deep breathing exercise to help manage her anxiety.

"Every day, the fear of having another seizure crosses my mind. I pray I won't have to experience another.

"I've been seizure free for two-and-a-half-years now, which is a big milestone. But with epilepsy, you never know what's around the corner. You could be clear for years, and then something could happen that triggers another seizure," Georgia said.

Every six months, Georgia undergoes a 48-hour-long EEG, followed by an appointment with her neurologist to discuss her results. She credits her neurologist for being very supportive and instrumental in helping her to optimally manage her epilepsy.

"My neurologist has been absolutely incredible. She's like a second mum to me. She shares a similar outlook on life with me. Although she acknowledges that I need to take extra precautions these days, she believes that my epilepsy shouldn't stop me from doing the things I want to do," Georgia said.

Georgia is a strong supporter of *Look for epilepsy*, a UCB-led community engagement initiative designed to highlight the much-needed support available to those living with epilepsy, and their carers, while raising awareness of the neurological condition. Given her first-hand experience, Georgia understands the many difficulties faced by people with epilepsy, and the importance of raising community awareness of, and improving support for those affected.

"Epilepsy tends to be overlooked by society. Very few people truly appreciate the number of Australians living with the disease and the daily battles they experience.

"Epilepsy is a complex disease that involves the brain and the nervous system. It affects many Australians and deserves a lot more public attention and understanding," said Georgia.

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