



### **The Brain Briefing, Episode 3**

Dr. Luedke: Introduction to Self-Management for Epilepsy, Feb. 7, 2023

Credits:

Host – Maria Perrone

Guest – Dr. Matthew Luedke

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Maria Perrone (00:00):

Welcome to the Brain Briefing, brief conversations with neurology experts with information for everyday people. With us today is Dr. Matt Luedke, a neurologist who specializes in the care of seizures and hospital patients. And today we'll be talking about self-management for epilepsy.

(00:21):

What does self-management mean in a general sense?

Dr. Matt Luedke (00:24):

So, self-management is the set of skills, behaviors, habits, approaches, and attitudes that we have towards our own self-care in the setting of an illness. In the general medical world, self-management is a mainstay in chronic diseases, for example diabetes and hypertension, because it allows people with those conditions to optimize their own self-care and optimize their own ability to address the risk factors and address the things that make their condition worse and make their condition affect their life in conjunction with the regular medical care. It's the part of our own health that we own and that we control and that we manage. And the neat thing is there are ways to get better at it. There are skills that we can develop, there are habits and approaches that we can have to make that part of our lives better. Regardless of what it is.

Maria Perrone (01:27):

Can you give a few examples of what self-management might look like?

Dr. Matt Luedke (01:32):

Sure. So, I'm a walking example of self-management in one way. So, I had high blood pressure since I was in my twenties. And I'll tell you what, when I was in my twenties, I didn't take my medicines well. You get distracted, you put things off, you don't necessarily use tools like pillboxes and things like that. And lo and behold, you check your blood pressure and it's a lot higher than it should be.

And this is true, even while I was going to medical school. You'd think, "Well, he's a doctor, he should know better." Well, no. And it's because it's not a matter of knowledge, it's a matter of behaviors and habits and skills that you build up over time. And what do I do now? I use a pill box, I put my pill box in the same place I put it every day, it's where I brush my teeth in the morning and brush my teeth at night. So, I've anchored it to habits that I have on a regular basis. And in the past, I don't anymore, but in the past, I've set alarms on my phone to remind me, "Hey, take your medicines." Is it a big set of



changes? No, but it's these little skills and habits and behaviors that I've developed that make me much more consistent in taking my medicines and has improved my health and quality of life tremendously.

Maria Perrone (02:38):

What would self-management be, specific to someone with epilepsy? What would that look like for someone with epilepsy and how do you recommend that someone gets started with self-management?

Dr. Matt Luedke (02:50):

So, there are, in the field of epilepsy, two broad categories of self-management strategies. One is sort of a skills-based approach. Those skills and habits that we can develop that allow us to take our medicines better, have better self-efficacy, have better social skills in an environment, better compensatory skills for dealing with things like insurance issues or dealing with things like transportation.

(03:18):

And then there are what one might call psychosocial skills. Skills that involve mood or emotions and self-regulation of how we respond emotionally to our environment and our experience. Both are useful. There is evidence to show that skills-based approaches really do improve self-management as measured by things like taking medications and stuff like that. But there's also evidence to show that quality of life improves when you deal with those emotional skills. And so, both approaches are powerful.

(03:54):

It's hard to find programs that combine the two of them. So, you can look independently. As far as the social skills based or skills-based approaches in terms of education, there are some programs out there that are available, depending on where you live and what sort of epilepsy centers and societies exist in your area. It's hit or miss in terms of the region, but there are specialized programs that are being studied and explored and that are available to the public for people with epilepsy.

(04:24):

Aside from that though, there are little things that you can do already on a daily basis to put into practice your self-management. So, take for example, one of the big challenges that people with epilepsy have that's medications. The biggest reason for people with an otherwise well controlled seizure disorder to have breakthrough seizures is because of missed doses. You can help by building habits with, as I said earlier in this discussion, using a pill box, attaching those dosing times to regular events that you have in your life, like getting dressed or brushing your teeth or your morning cup of coffee or your evening bath or shower.

(05:03):

Doing that can help anchor things. And those are what we're talking about, at least in the individual basis, about those skills that you can develop even if you don't have access to a program.

(05:12):

As far as the psychosocial skills, the emotional management skills, a lot of those are derived off of something called cognitive behavioral therapy. And in general, given the prevalence of anxiety and depression in the setting of seizure disorders, I'm a big advocate for psychological care and establishing a relationship with a therapist just in general for my patients.

(05:37):



But cognitive behavioral therapy is a well-validated, well described tool for regulating our emotions and if it's something that interests you, talking with your doctor about a referral to a local psychologist who does cognitive behavioral therapy is a great start. Again, there are some programs that are developed around that specifically for people with epilepsy. But again, a lot of them have their roots in cognitive behavioral therapy, and so that might just be a good approach in general. Take care of your emotional health and develop a strong skillset to begin with.

Maria Perrone (06:13):

Thanks to Dr. Luedke for talking to us today. Thanks to our audio engineer Stephanie Perez-Sanchez. And thanks to you for listening to this episode of The Brain Briefing. You can find more info about the Duke Comprehensive Epilepsy Center at <https://neurology.duke.edu/DCEC>.