

POSH: ROMEO HAS EPILEPSY

After doctors diagnosed their son with epilepsy, the Beckhams are terrified that flash photography could harm him

After a series of hospital visits, Victoria and David Beckham's son Romeo, four, has been diagnosed with epilepsy. The news has left the devoted parents terrified that flash photography from the paparazzi that follow them everywhere could spark a life-threatening seizure.

Romeo was first rushed to hospital in October 2003 after having seizures. At the time it was put down to febrile convulsions, which are common in children with high temperatures. In July this year he was again rushed to hospital following a similar attack, then last month he was taken to hospital twice in four days after more seizures. He was diagnosed with epilepsy at the Ruber Internacional Hospital in Madrid.

'Epileptic seizures can vary and it's important for children to get the right diagnosis,' says

Dr Robert Appleton, consultant paediatric neurologist at Alder Hey Children's Hospital in Liverpool. 'I take a detailed history of the child's episodes, including eyewitness accounts. Once a diagnosis has been made, the type of epilepsy needs to be identified. There are at least 25 to 30 types.'

Victoria has expressed concern about the use of flash photography around Romeo and has told paparazzi: 'He's got epilepsy. All that flashing will start a fit. You can't do that!' Some news agencies have now agreed to stop taking pictures of him.

Photosensitivity can trigger a seizure in a person with epilepsy, says Dr Appleton, but it doesn't normally affect young children. 'A four-year-old boy isn't in this risk group,' he explains. 'The Beckhams may have been advised that Romeo could develop photosensitivity and are being cautious.' Although seizures can be life-threatening, Dr Appleton stresses this is rare. 'In 16 years of practice, I've only seen two deaths due to epilepsy,' he says.

So what's the outlook for Romeo? 'There's every reason for the Beckhams to be positive,' says Dr Appleton. 'With the right medication, there's a 60 to 70 per cent chance of epilepsy being fully controlled. This means Romeo will have a perfectly normal childhood and can go to discos, swim and play football.' ■

Melissa Murphy

Epilepsy explained

What is it? A neurological condition that causes seizures.

Causes These can include a head injury, meningitis or a stroke, but often the cause isn't known.

Symptoms Seizures can vary from brief moments of impaired consciousness, jerking of limbs and confused behaviour to convulsive seizures.

Who has it? Epilepsy can develop at any age. It's usually diagnosed during childhood or after the age of 60. More than 450,000 people in the UK have epilepsy and one in 50 will develop epilepsy during their life.

Treatment Seizures are often controlled by medication. If this isn't effective, a ketogenic (high-fat) diet can help. Surgery may also be suitable.

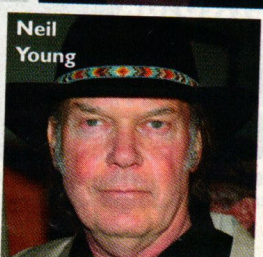
Information Contact Epilepsy Action (call 0800 8005050 or visit www.epilepsy.org.uk) or The National Society for Epilepsy (call 01494 601400 or visit www.epilepsynse.org.uk).



Elton John



Rik Mayall



Neil Young



Other celebs with epilepsy

Elton John Elton, 59, is Romeo's godfather and also has epilepsy. He's reported to be helping the Beckhams understand Romeo's condition.

Rik Mayall Comedian Rik, 48, was diagnosed with epilepsy after a quad bike crash in 1998. He takes medication to control seizures.

Max Clifford The publicist, 63, developed epilepsy at the age of 46.

Danny Glover Lethal Weapon actor Danny, 60, was diagnosed with epilepsy at 15 and took medication for 20 years, but now says he can control the seizures without drugs.

Neil Young The 61-year-old singer has experienced seizures throughout his career.