

# JAN

Job Accommodation Network

Practical Solutions • Workplace Success

## Accommodation and Compliance Series

# Accommodation and Compliance Series: Employees with Cataplexy

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## Preface

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## **JAN'S Accommodation and Compliance Series**

### **Introduction**

JAN's Accommodation and Compliance Series is designed to help employers determine effective accommodations and comply with Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Each publication in the series addresses a specific medical condition and provides information about the condition, ADA information, accommodation ideas, and resources for additional information.

The Accommodation and Compliance Series is a starting point in the accommodation process and may not address every situation. Accommodations should be made on a case by case basis, considering each employee's individual limitations and accommodation needs. Employers are encouraged to contact JAN to discuss specific situations in more detail.

For information on assistive technology and other accommodation ideas, visit JAN's Searchable Online Accommodation Resource (SOAR) at <http://askjan.org/soar>.

### **Information about Cataplexy**

Cataplexy is the sudden loss of voluntary muscle tone or temporary paralysis that is often triggered by extreme emotion, such as laughter or fear. Cataplexy by itself is considered a rare disease. Most episodes are short in duration, lasting a few seconds up to five minutes. These episodes tend to have few, if any, residual effects. Some people with narcolepsy can have cataplectic attacks almost daily, while there are some people with narcolepsy that have never experienced cataplexy.

During a cataplectic attack the person will remain conscious; however, the person may experience jaw dropping, which can cause speech limitations, or eyelids drooping, which can interfere with vision. Other symptoms may include balance issues, upper extremity weakness, and/or collapsing.

While a cataplectic attack is usually very short in duration and leaves no residual effects, there may be symptoms that would require workplace accommodations. Some of the most common limitations stemming from a cataplectic attack are weakened speech, vision issues, trouble balancing, upper extremity weakness, and/or collapsing.

### **Cataplexy and the Americans with Disabilities Act**

The ADA does not contain a list of medical conditions that constitute disabilities. Instead, the ADA has a general definition of disability that each person must meet. A person has a disability if he/she has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as

having an impairment. For more information about how to determine whether a person has a disability under the ADA, see [How to Determine Whether a Person Has a Disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act \(ADAAA\)](#).

## **Accommodating Employees with Cataplexy**

People with cataplexy may develop some of the limitations discussed below, but seldom develop all of them. Also, the degree of limitation will vary among individuals. Be aware that not all people with cataplexy will need accommodations to perform their jobs and many others may only need a few accommodations. The following is only a sample of the possibilities available. Numerous other accommodation solutions may exist.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. What limitations is the employee experiencing?
2. How do these limitations affect the employee and the employee's job performance?
3. What specific job tasks are problematic as a result of these limitations?
4. What accommodations are available to reduce or eliminate these problems? Are all possible resources being used to determine possible accommodations?
5. Has the employee been consulted regarding possible accommodations?
6. Once accommodations are in place, would it be useful to meet with the employee to evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodations and to determine whether additional accommodations are needed?
7. Do supervisory personnel and employees need training?

### **Accommodation Ideas:**

#### **Limitations**

##### Balancing

- Living Independently
  - Bath Chairs
  - Canes
  - Crutches
  - Grab Bars
  - Personal Safety and Fall Alert Devices

- Rollators and Rolling Walkers
- Scooters
- Stair Assists
- Stair Lifts
- Swing Away Grab Bars
- Toileting Aids
- Walkers with Seats
- Walkers
- Moving Around
  - All-Terrain Scooters
  - All-Terrain Wheelchairs
  - Canes
  - Crutches
  - Personal Transportation and Mobility Products
  - Rollators and Rolling Walkers
  - Scooters
  - Stair Assists
  - Stair Lifts
  - Walkers with Seats
  - Walkers
- Working at Heights
  - Aerial Lifts
  - Fall Protection
  - Rolling Safety Ladders
- Working Safely
  - Anti-fatigue Matting
  - Evacuation Devices
  - Fall Protection
  - Padded Edging
  - Protective Eyewear

Handling/Fingering

- Industrial
  - Anti-vibration Gloves
  - Anti-vibration Tool Wraps
  - Compact Material Handling
  - Ergonomic and Pneumatic Tools
  - Ergonomic Equipment
  - Extra Grip Gloves
  - Grip Aids
  - Vacuum Pickup Tools
- Office Equipment
  - Alternative Input Devices
  - Alternative Keyboards
  - Alternative Mice
  - Articulating Keyboard Trays
  - Book Holders
  - Compact Material Handling
  - Ergonomic Equipment
  - Expanded Keyboards
  - Forearm Supports
  - Grip Aids
  - Keyguards
  - Miniature Keyboards
  - On-Screen Keyboards
  - One-Handed Keyboards
  - Page Turners
  - Speech Recognition Software
  - Scribe/Notetaker
  - Typing / Keyboarding Aids
  - Writing Aids
- Other
  - Aide/Assistant/Attendant

- Money Handling Products
- Periodic Rest Breaks

#### Stress Intolerance

- Apps for Anxiety and Stress
- Behavior Modification Techniques
- Counseling/Therapy
- Environmental Sound Machines / Tinnitus Maskers / White Noise Machines
- Flexible Schedule
- Job Restructuring
- Marginal Functions
- Modified Break Schedule
- Supervisory Methods
- Support Animal
- Support Person

#### Walking

- Scooters
- Walkers
- Wheelchairs

#### Weak Speech

- Flexible Schedule
- Job Restructuring
- Outgoing Voice Amplification - Telephone
- Voice Amplification

#### **Work-Related Functions**

##### Parking

- Flexible Schedule
- Telework, Work from Home, Working Remotely
- Wheelchairs

##### Work Site Access

- Accessible Toilets and Toilet Seats
- Adjustable Workstations for Office Settings
- Alternative Locks
- Anti-fatigue Matting
- Braille and/or ADA Signage
- Building Accessibility Products
- Door Knob Grips and Handles
- Flexible Schedule
- Portable Ramps
- Ramps
- Scooters
- Service Animal
- Support Animal
- Telework, Work from Home, Working Remotely
- Wearable Anti-fatigue Matting
- Wheelchair Lifts
- Wheelchairs
- Worksite Redesign / Modified Workspace

#### Work Station Access

- Adjustable and Ergonomic School Desks and Equipment
- Adjustable Desk Top Workstations for Office Settings
- Adjustable Workstations for Industrial Settings
- Anti-fatigue Matting
- Articulating Keyboard Trays
- Assist Lift Cushions
- Chair Mats
- Chairs for Little People
- Chairs for People who are Tall
- Dual Monitors
- Elevating Lift and Office Chairs
- Ergonomic and Adjustable Office Chairs



- Ergonomic Equipment
- Expanded Keyboards
- Forearm Supports
- Forward Leaning Chairs
- Large-Rated Chairs
- Monitor Mirrors
- Monitor Risers
- Mousing Surfaces
- Stand-lean Stools
- Supine Workstations
- Work Platforms
- Zero Gravity (reclining) Chairs

## Situations and Solutions:

**An applicant disclosed that she has cataplexy and mentioned concerns with the on-the-job travel duties required for the position.**

Occasional travel via rental car is listed as a function of the job to attend conferences. The employer agrees to arrange for transportation via bus instead of rental car if the applicant is selected for the position.

**A paralegal would have weakness and numbness in her dominant hand immediately following a cataplectic attack.**

To continue her case documentation, she was accommodated with a one-handed keyboard and speech recognition software.

**A newspaper editor would temporarily have impaired speech shortly after a cataplectic attack.**

To maintain constant communication with her colleagues, she was accommodated with an instant messaging program on her computer.

**An accountant was experiencing stress due to an increased workload, resulting in more frequent cataplectic attacks.**

To accommodate him, his employer restructured his position to only include the essential functions. The employer also referred him to the company Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to help manage his stress.

**A secretary with cataplexy would experience an attack after a fit of laughter, causing her to fall out of her chair.**

She was accommodated with an office chair with arm rests and a lap belt so she would not fall to the floor.

**A warehouse worker would collapse during a cataplectic attack.**

To ensure workplace safety, his work area was covered with rubber matting to cushion his fall and he was provided a harness for times he had to climb up a ladder.

**An employee diagnosed with cataplexy raised concerns about the large amount of walking needed to get to the printer from her workstation.**

The employer moves the employee's workstation to be closer to the location of the printer.

**An applicant disclosed that she has cataplexy.**

The employer is concerned with how to handle a situation should the applicant lose consciousness at work. The applicant and the employer sit down and create a plan of action so that if the applicant is chosen for the position, supervisors will know how to respond in the event this occurs.

**A supervisor has noticed that occasionally an employee with cataplexy will slump over at his desk and fears that the employee will injure himself by falling out of**

**the office chair.**

The employee and supervisor agree that an office chair without wheels and larger armrests would reduce this possibility considerably. The employer decides to provide the employee a new chair as an accommodation.

**An employee diagnosed with cataplexy reported that speaking with his supervisor can sometimes lead to his condition flaring up due to high levels of stress.**

As an accommodation, the employer decides that the supervisor will correspond with the employee via e-mail rather than in person as much as possible.

## **Products**

There are numerous products that can be used to accommodate people with limitations. JAN's Searchable Online Accommodation Resource at <http://askjan.org/soar> is designed to let users explore various accommodation options. Many product vendor lists are accessible through this system; however, JAN provides these lists and many more that are not available on the Web site upon request. Contact JAN directly if you have specific accommodation situations, are looking for products, need vendor information, or are seeking a referral.

## Resources

### **Job Accommodation Network**

West Virginia University  
PO Box 6080  
Morgantown, WV 26506-6080  
Toll Free: (800) 526-7234  
TTY: (304) 293-7186  
Fax: (304) 293-5407  
jan@askjan.org  
<http://AskJAN.org>

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is a free consulting service that provides information about job accommodations, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the employability of people with disabilities.

### **Office of Disability Employment Policy**

200 Constitution Avenue,  
NW, Room S-1303  
Washington, DC 20210  
Toll Free: (866) 633-7365  
odep@dol.gov  
<http://dol.gov/odep>

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) is an agency within the U.S. Department of Labor. ODEP provides national leadership to increase employment opportunities for adults and youth with disabilities while striving to eliminate barriers to employment.

**Narcolepsy Network**

46 Union Drive, #A212  
North Kingstown, RI 02852  
Toll Free: (888) 292-6522  
Direct: (401) 667-2523  
Fax: (401) 633-6567  
narnet@narcolepsynetwork.org  
<http://narcolepsynetwork.org/>

Narcolepsy Network is a national, non-profit organization incorporated in 1986. Members are people who have narcolepsy (or related sleep disorders), their families and friends, and professionals involved in treatment, research, and public education regarding narcolepsy.

**National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke**

P.O. Box 5801  
Bethesda, MD 20824  
Toll Free: (800) 352-9424  
Direct: (301) 496-5751  
<http://www.ninds.nih.gov>

The NINDS, an agency of the U.S. Federal Government and a component of the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. Public Health Service, is a lead agency for the congressionally designated Decade of the Brain, and the leading supporter of biomedical research on disorders of the brain and nervous system.

**National Sleep Foundation**

1010 N. Glebe Road, Suite 310  
Arlington, VA 22201  
Direct: (703) 243-1697  
nsf@sleepfoundation.org  
<https://sleepfoundation.org/>

The National Sleep Foundation is a nonprofit organization that promotes public understanding of sleep and sleep disorders and supports sleep-related education, research, and advocacy to improve public health and safety.

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