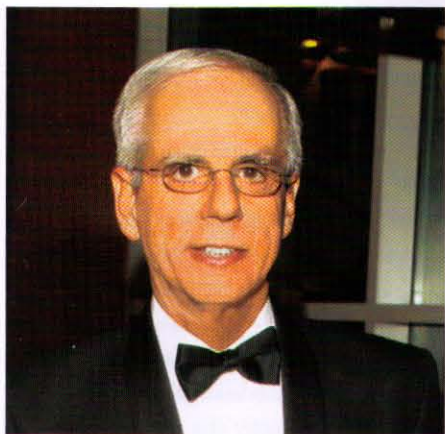


ROLE MODEL

Tony Coelho: Innovator & Leader

Former congressman Tony Coelho believes that epilepsy is the cornerstone of his success. "I say openly and publicly, 'Thank God for my epilepsy.' This thing has made me, has driven me," Coelho says. "I am very comfortable with who I am. I accept the cards that have been dealt me. I don't let people knock me down."



At 16, after sustaining a head injury in a car accident, Coelho began having seizures. His parents believed epilepsy was a curse and kept the diagnosis a secret from him. Coelho attended college, but he continued to have headaches and "passing out spells." It was not until he attempted to enter the priesthood—and was rejected—that he learned the truth about his condition. He turned his attention to other professions, but when potential employers discovered

that he had epilepsy, they too turned him down.

Feeling dejected, Coelho became suicidal. Then a chance introduction to Bob Hope made all the difference. The entertainer befriended Coelho and encouraged him to find his ministry in politics. "I took his advice and wrote a letter to my congressman, and that's how I got here," Coelho says.

By 1979 Coelho was a congressman. Drawing on his personal experience, he became an advocate for people with disabilities and created the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which was signed into law in 1990. After serving six terms in Congress, Coelho continues to champion the rights of those who are discriminated against because of their physical or mental conditions, most recently as a vocal supporter of the 2007 ADA Restoration Act. For his lifetime of leadership, the Epilepsy Foundation honored Coelho with its 2007 Distinguished Achievement Award last fall.

To others with epilepsy, Coelho offers this advice: "Change what you can, if you don't like it, and accept what you can't change. But at some point, you've got to be able to look in the mirror and say, 'I love that person.' You've got to believe in yourself." —Emily Soares

QUICK QUIZ

How many people worldwide have epilepsy?

A. 50,000

B. 500,000

C. 5 million

D. 50 million

Answer: D. According to the World Health Organization, there are an estimated 50 million people in the world with epilepsy. Three-fourths of them receive no treatment for their seizures.



ASK AN ADVOCATE

Advice corner

Epilepsy Advocate Susan N. is unstoppable. A technology coordinator, mother of two and an aspiring triathlete, Susan also has temporal lobe epilepsy. In 2003, while recovering from encephalitis, she began having complex and simple partial seizures. After trying numerous medications and undergoing three surgeries, today Susan is seizure-free.

Q: I've just been diagnosed with epilepsy. What now?

Susan: First, let me say that you can live well with epilepsy. Seek out answers and try to stay positive. Visit the Epilepsy Foundation Website message boards and introduce yourself. (Go to www.epilepsyfoundation.org.)

Second, it's very important that you take control of your medical care. I would recommend you find an epileptologist, a doctor who specializes in epilepsy treatment. If you are unhappy with your medication or your health care, ask your doctor about alternatives. Also be sure to go to the doctor prepared with a list of questions. Be your own advocate, and don't settle.

To learn more about Susan and other Epilepsy Advocates and hear their inspiring stories, visit www.EpilepsyAdvocate.com.