





Real-Life Hero

On TV he plays a man with superpowers, but at home Greg Grunberg faces the same challenges as any other parent of a child with epilepsy. **BY EMILY SOARES**

*Greg Grunberg has had a rich career in film and television, including starring roles in such shows as *Heroes*, *The Jake Effect*, *Alias* and *Felicity*. But nothing prepared him for his role when his oldest son was diagnosed with epilepsy.*

JUST TALK ABOUT IT

In 2003, when Jake was seven years old, he began having staring spells. At the time, Grunberg and his wife, Elizabeth, never imagined that Jake's behavior was a result of a seizure condition. In fact, they didn't know anything about epilepsy until the day their son was diagnosed. Like other parents of children with epilepsy, they were scared and didn't know where to turn for support or more information regarding his condition. "We wish that we had known somebody to call when we first received Jake's diagnosis. At that time we didn't know about the Epilepsy Foundation," Grunberg explains. "I wish that someone had told us that everything would be okay. The main thing to know is that you or your child will absolutely be able to live a normal life. It's just going to take time."

KEEP SEARCHING

As with many people with epilepsy, finding the right treatment for Jake has been an ongoing challenge. "If your doctor is in any way content with you or your child continuing to have seizures, then get another doctor," Grunberg advises. "The truth is, there are so many great medicines and treatment options and there are so many great doctors. You have to constantly chase after the treatment that works best. If possible, find an epileptologist—someone who specializes in epilepsy—or, in our case, a pediatric epileptologist. Do not settle until you or your child is seizure-free."

CREATE QUALITY TIME

For Grunberg, being his son's advocate also means encouraging Jake to talk openly about his epilepsy. "We tell him, 'If somebody looks at you differently because you have epilepsy, then you don't have time for him or her,'" Grunberg says. "Life's too short."

He also points out that just because one of your children has a chronic condition, you can't treat them differently from their siblings. "When siblings are involved, it's important to spend quality time with them as well," Grunberg explains.

"We do something called special nights where we take Jake, Ben or Sam out so they each get time with us. Just spending time alone gives each kid the attention he craves."

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TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE

Since Jake's diagnosis, Grunberg has become an outspoken supporter of the entire epilepsy community. This spring

he chaired the 2008 National Epilepsy Walk, and in November, he will launch TalkAboutIt.org (see below).

For his efforts, some might call Grunberg a hero, but he is quick to shift the spotlight. "A hero is someone who overcomes an adversity every single day of his or her life," he says. "After seeing what Jake goes through, I've learned never to accept the word *no* from anybody. You will never hear Jake say 'I can't.'"



Greg and Elizabeth Grunberg, with their son Jake. This fall Greg will launch TalkAboutIt.org to encourage open communication about epilepsy. The site will feature celebrities from film, TV and sports. For more information, visit GregGrunberg.com.