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## EPILEPSY

**E**pilepsy is a **SEIZURE DISORDER** in pets where **no known cause can be found**. This requires ruling out all other possible causes of the seizure, such as exposure to poisonous or hallucinogenic substances, previous head trauma, and metabolic disorders. Epilepsy can be a genetic, heritable disease. Epilepsy can occur in any species from cats & dogs to birds, rabbits & rodents. Dogs are most commonly affected. Breeds with a high incidence of epilepsy include Poodles, Labrador and Golden Retrievers, and Border Collies.



**RECOMMENDED TESTS** include a physical examination, blood tests, and, if heart disease is suspected, possibly x-rays or an electrocardiogram (EKG). If these are normal, further diagnostics may be performed depending on the severity and frequency of the seizures. Occasional seizures are of less concern than when the seizures are becoming more severe and frequent. Depending on availability, a spinal fluid tap and fluid analysis may be performed or specialized imaging of the head with a CAT scan or MRI might be performed. Fortunately, these additional tests are usually not needed, but if they are required your pet would be referred to a specialist.

### A seizure may have all or any combination of the following:

- Loss or derangement of consciousness
- Contractions of all the muscles in the body
- Changes in mental awareness from non-responsiveness to hallucinations
- Involuntary urination, defecation, or salivation
- Behavioral changes, including non-recognition of owner, viciousness, pacing, and running in circles

### Seizures consist of three components:

- 1) The **pre-ictal phase**, or **aura**, is a period of altered behavior in which the pet may hide, appear nervous, or seek out the owner. It may be restless, nervous, whining, shaking, or salivating. This may last a few seconds to a few hours.
- 2) The **ictal phase** is the seizure itself and lasts from a few seconds to about five minutes. During this period the pet usually falls on its side and seems paralyzed while shaking. The

above symptoms occur. If it is not over within five minutes, the pet is said to be in status epilepticus or prolonged seizure.

- 3) During the post-ictal phase, there is confusion, disorientation, salivation, pacing, restlessness, and/or temporary blindness.

Despite the dramatic signs of a seizure, the pet feels no pain, only bewilderment. Pets do not swallow their tongues. If you put your fingers into its mouth, you will do no benefit to your pet and will run a high risk of being bitten very badly. **The important thing is to keep the pet from falling and hurting itself. As long as it is on the floor or ground, there is little chance of harm occurring.**

## TREATMENT

If it is a first time seizure, we generally just observe the pet for further seizures. Treatment is determined by how long it takes for another seizure to occur. That may be days, months, or years. At some point, many pets have seizures **frequently enough to justify continuous anticonvulsant therapy**. Since that means that medication must be given every 12 to 24 hours for the rest of the pet's life, we do not recommend that until seizures occur more often than about every 2 months or unless they last more than five minutes.

\* It is important to avoid sudden discontinuation of any anticonvulsant medication. Even normal animals may be induced to seizure if placed on anticonvulsant medication and then abruptly withdrawn from it. Your veterinarian can outline a schedule for discontinuing the medication.

## STATUS EPILEPTICUS

Status epilepticus bears special note. It is characterized by a seizure that does not stop on its own. When this occurs, the pet's life is endangered. Intravenous medication is given to try and stop the seizure. If a seizure is lasting more than 10 minutes, you should call your veterinarian immediately.