

# Seizures

## What is a seizure?

Seizures (fits) occur due to abnormal brain activity. They can occur because of an injury, a problem with the organs (a metabolic problem), or for an unknown reason. The latter is the most common and termed 'idiopathic epilepsy'. Seizures can occur in both dogs and cats and are most common in pets aged 6 months to 5 years of age, but can affect animals of any age.

## What does a seizure look like?

Watching any animal seizure can be very distressing, but it is important to keep calm. Your pet will often be unresponsive, lying on their side, stretching their neck and limbs in a jerking or paddling movement. They may alternate between being relaxed and very tense. They may salivate, vocalise, and pass urine and faeces. Seizures usually last between 1-3 minutes, but may be longer. Some animals behave strangely before and after a seizure – they may look thirsty or hungry or become restless; it can be helpful to look for these signs.

## How do we decide when to treat a seizure?

We normally treat the seizures if your pet is having more than one seizure a month, having several seizures in a short period, if the seizures are long, or if there is a sudden episode after head trauma. Unfortunately the treatment is not curative and lifelong medication is often needed and is aimed at decreasing the duration, severity and frequency of the seizures.

## How is the cause of the seizure diagnosed?

Initially a blood sample is taken to check the organ function. Additional diagnostic tests include an MRI or CT scan to image the brain, or taking a sample of spinal fluid. However, often the cause of the seizures is not found and idiopathic epilepsy is diagnosed.

## What to do if my dog has a seizure?

Move any items out of the way of the animal to prevent them harming themselves. Try not to handle your pet as they may be confused/disorientated and may react due to not realising you are there. Try to time the duration of the seizure. After the seizure has passed ensure that there is plenty of food and fresh water and keep your pet calm in a quiet room with low lighting.

### When to call the vet

- If the seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes or you are worried it is unusual for your pet.
- If your pet has had several seizures within a day.
- If you are at all worried about your pet's condition or the medication.
- If your pet seems uncomfortable, is drinking more or is very lethargic.

## How is epilepsy managed?

Medication is used to decrease the frequency, duration and severity of seizures; this may be done using one or more type of tablets. It is important that the vet checks your pet every 3 months in order to monitor your pet's condition carefully. Regular blood tests are important for us to monitor the medication levels in your pet's blood and also monitor any potential side effects that the medication may have. Making a seizure diary recording the date, time and duration of seizure will help to monitor progress and help with the medication dosing.

## What sort of life will my dog have and why is it important to manage epilepsy?

It is important to remember that epileptic pets can have very healthy, happy and long lives. If managed poorly, apart from being upsetting for both you and your animal, each time your pet has a seizure some brain damage will occur leading to an increased risk of having repeat seizures.