

SEIZURES

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What are they?

Seizures are the involuntary contractions of muscles due to abnormal electrical impulses in the brain. There are many causes, with epilepsy being one of the most common cause. Epilepsy is an abnormality of the brain's electrical activity that causes chronic, recurrent seizures. A diagnosis of epilepsy is made when no other causes are identified. Seizures can also be caused by hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), toxin ingestion, metabolic disorders, genetics, hormonal imbalances, brain infections and liver disease to name a few. Another common cause of seizures we often see in older animals are brain tumors.

How are they treated?

Treatment of seizures is dependent on the underlying cause. If the seizures are being caused by something such as low blood sugar, then the problem is easily detected and treated. More often than not, it is necessary for your veterinarian to run many diagnostic tests in order for the cause to be revealed. In cases of brain tumor or infection, an MRI and/or CSF tap (spinal tap) may have to be performed. Brain tumors that are causing seizures must be removed or their size decreased with radiation therapy. Anti-inflammatory and anti-seizure medications also help pets with brain tumors. Epilepsy can usually be controlled with lifelong oral medications, however, they are never really cured. Other causes such as metabolic and hormonal disorder can also be treated.

What is the prognosis for seizures?

Most of the time seizures are treatable and the animal can continue living a normal, healthy life. There are situations, however, when a brain tumor or infection is incurable and the animal's chances of living a life of good quality are diminished. A personalized treatment plan is important to slow the progression of seizures. Talk to your veterinarian regarding the best treatment protocol for your pet.

What symptoms can present as the disease progresses?

Signs of progressive disease to be aware of include:

- Increased number of seizures (can be upwards of several per day)
- Increased intensity of seizures
- Increased length of time that seizures last
- Increased postictal phase (length of time it takes animal to return to normal after a seizure)
- Reclusive behavior

If seizures are due to a brain tumor, the pet may also experience:

- Depression
- Confusion
- Head tilt, loss of balance
- Cranial nerve deficits (decreased or loss of vision, difficulty swallowing, voice change)
- Pacing or circling
- Weakness
- Gain or loss of appetite
- Vomiting
- Weight loss, often severe
- Paralysis
- Coma

Crisis – Immediate veterinary assistance needed regardless of disease

- Difficulty breathing
- Prolonged seizures
- Uncontrollable vomiting/diarrhea
- Sudden collapse
- Profuse bleeding – internal or external
- Crying/whining from pain*

**It should be noted that most animals will instinctually hide their pain. Vocalization of any sort that is out of the ordinary for your pet may indicate that their pain and anxiety has become too much for them to bear. If your pet vocalizes due to pain or anxiety, please consult with your tending veterinarian immediately.*

Common Signs of Pain

Panting, lameness, difficulty sleeping, pacing, abnormal posture, body tensing, poor grooming habits, tucked tail, dilated pupils, licking sore spot, muscle atrophy, decreased appetite, vocalizing/yowling, reclusive behavior, aggressive behavior, avoiding stairs/jumping, depressed, unable to stand.