

Seizures

Seizures are a neurological anomaly that may occur in some pets. They are caused by a wide variety of reasons and may manifest differently from animal to animal. Seizures, although frequently frightening for the owners, can often be managed by medication once properly diagnosed. This handout will provide general information on the description, causes and solutions for seizure disorders in pets.

Seizures, often called convulsions or fits, will manifest themselves differently in each animal. It is important to remember, that while frightening for the owner, your pet does not feel any pain during the episode. And contrary to popular belief, your pet will not swallow its tongue during a seizure episode. In fact, you are more likely to be bitten severely if you try to force anything into the animal's mouth. The only precaution that you should take is to make sure that your pet is not in danger of falling or striking a limb or its head on anything during the episode. After the seizure is complete, take time to observe and comfort your pet as they may be disoriented.

As seizures appear differently in each animal, it is best to look for some of the common signs:

- Sporadic muscle contractions over the entire body
- Falling to the side with a drawn back position of the head and neck
- Loss or semi-loss of consciousness
- Involuntary vomiting, salivation, urination or defecation
- Changes in mental awareness from unresponsive staring to hallucinations
- Behavioral changes including panting, pacing, odd running patterns, extreme docility, extreme viciousness and not recognizing known individuals

During the seizure, your pet will experience three different stages. The first stage of a seizure is called the pre-ictal or aura phase. During this phase your pet may exhibit a wide range of behavioral changes. These changes may include hiding, whining, nervousness, shaking and many others. This stage may continue for a few seconds to a few hours. It is important to remember, however, that some pets do not experience or manifest any signs of this phase.

The second phase to a seizure is the ictal phase. This phase may last from a few seconds to five minutes and is the period in which the body convulses and displays the typical signs of a seizure described above. If the seizure lasts longer than five minutes, it is known as prolonged seizure or status. Status is a severe and extreme seizure condition and you should seek immediate medical attention.

The third phase of the seizure is known as the post-ictal phase. This phase may include changes in mental awareness, confusion, restlessness and temporary blindness. This phase varies by pet in length, symptoms and severity.

Seizures may be caused by many different factors and they are often indicators of other physical problems. The most common cause of seizures in pets is epilepsy. A common form of epilepsy is

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caused by the rapid over-stimulation of the neurons in the brain. This over-stimulation may be caused from a head injury or may be genetic and inherited from birth. However, seizures may also be a side effect and indicator of other physical problems. These problems may include brain tumors, poisoning, low blood sugar, nerve or muscle problems and organ disease.

Depending on the frequency and severity of your pet's seizures, it may be started on oral medications to help control the seizures. Once started, however, these medications must be given reliably, for the rest of the pet's life. Therefore, your veterinarian will do careful screening and testing before placing your pet on these medications. It is important to remember that your pet's seizure disorder is a manageable condition and many pets live long, happy and rewarding lives with epilepsy.

