

Caring for your Pet with Epilepsy

Contact Information

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What is Epilepsy?

Epilepsy is a relatively common neurological disorder in dogs. It leads to seizures which are distressing to see but not usually harmful to your pet. Most epilepsy is 'Idiopathic'. This means the reason for it has not been found but it tends to happen more in some breeds of dog than in others. Epilepsy is very rare in cats. Sometimes, especially in older pets, seizures can be caused by more serious disease in the brain (intracranial disease) or elsewhere in the body (extracranial disease).

What should I do if my pet has a seizure at home?

- Firstly, stay calm and quiet. The more external stimuli (light, noise and touch) your pet receives while in a fit the longer the fit is likely to last.
- Make sure your pet is in a safe place. If they are e.g., at the top of the stairs or next to a fire, drag them away by a hind leg. Do not put your hands near their face as they may bite without knowing. Try to move any furniture out of the way that your pet may injure themselves on.
- Turn off all the lights and any electrical devices creating noise and light such as TV's and radios as this will reduce stimulation of the brain.
- Take note of what time the seizure started and what happened during the seizure because this helps us to decide on treatment.
- Leave your pet alone in a dark place for 10 minutes. If they are not recovering at the end of that time they need to be seen by a vet as an emergency because if a pet gets 'stuck' in a fit it can cause permanent changes to the brain which prevent them from recovering.
- When your pet is having a fit, involuntary muscle spasms often cause pets may pass urine and motions during the seizure.
- Even when they are recovering, most pets have a period after the fit when they are not back to normal (the postictal phase) during which they may be very hungry/thirsty or wander about and be unable to settle.

How is Epilepsy diagnosed?

Dogs have seizures more easily than humans, so we do not usually treat the first seizure which a pet has but a check-up once your pet has recovered from their first fit is always a good idea. We may advise blood tests to check for possible causes outside the brain. If we suspect serious intracranial disease, we will also recommend further investigation with MRI imaging. Usually, we do not treat epilepsy unless it is impacting quality of life. This is when, for example, the pet is having more than one fit per month / more than one fit in any one day/ slow recovery from each fit / needing help to recover from a seizure.

PATIENT DETAILS

Name of patient:

Medications to manage seizures:

Epilepsy is incurable but medication usually controls fits well.

Pexion / Epiphen / Levetiracetam / Libromide – These are all medications which are used to decrease nerve cell activity in the brain. This makes seizures less likely. It takes about 7 days for any of these to take full effect so do not expect seizures to stop immediately. All animals are very tired for the first week they take antiseizure medication, but then this effect wears off. Some pets manage well on just one medication. Others need a combination of these to treat their pet.

Diazepam Rectal Tubes – Diazepam is absorbed through the rectal lining and helps to bring your pet out of their seizure. We recommend that you administer one of these tubes if your pet has a seizure lasting more than 3-5 minutes. To give this medication:

- Open the foil packaging. Remove the plastic cap.
- Fully insert the nozzle into your pet's rectum and squeeze until empty.
- Wait 5 minutes then repeat if the fit has not stopped.
- Wait another 5 minutes.

If the fit is still continuing after 10 minutes you need to call us and come to the surgery as an emergency.

How often should I bring my pet in for a check-up after starting on treatment?

For pets taking Epiphen or Libromide, a blood test to check that the dose of medication is correct is needed 2-4 weeks after starting treatment. This sample must be taken midway between morning and evening doses. Once your pet is taking their ideal dose, this blood test needs to be repeated every 3-6 months. Most pets with epilepsy need a gradually increasing dose of medication as they get older.

FOLLOW UP APPOINTMENT/BLOOD RETEST

Please bear in mind when making the appointment that we will need to test the blood phenobarbitone levels 5 hours after you give your medication.