

ORAH Info:

What do I need to know about seizures?



Seizures are one of the most frequently seen neurological problems in dogs. They are also occasionally seen in cats. A seizure may have all or any combination of the following:

1. Loss of or change in consciousness.
2. Rhythmic contractions of all the muscles in the body, or of one part of the body.
3. Changes in mental awareness from non-responsiveness to hallucinations.
4. Involuntary urination, defecation, or salivation.
5. Behavioral changes, including non-recognition of owner, viciousness, pacing, and running in circles.

HOW DO I RECOGNIZE A SEIZURE?

1. Before a seizure there is often a period of altered behavior in which a dog or cat may hide, appear nervous, or seek out the owner. The pet may be restless, whining, shaking, or drooling. This may last for a few seconds to a few hours.
2. The seizure itself typically lasts from a few seconds to about five minutes. Usually, some or all of the muscles of the body contract strongly. Your pet may fall on its side and often seems paralyzed while shaking.
3. After a seizure, there is usually a *post-ictal phase*, when your pet may be sleepy or confused. There may be pacing, restlessness, and/or temporary blindness.

IS MY PET IN TROUBLE DURING A SEIZURE?

Despite the dramatic signs of a seizure, they are not painful. Animals do not swallow their tongues. If you put your fingers into its mouth, you will not benefit your pet, and you will run a high risk of being badly bitten. The important thing is to keep your pet from falling and hurting itself. On the floor or ground, there is little chance of harm.

WHEN IS A SEIZURE AN EMERGENCY?

If your pet has had a seizure, contact us as soon as you can. It may be beneficial to perform certain tests right away. However, isolated seizures often do not require immediate treatment. Emergency care is needed if you suspect that your pet may have been injured or poisoned, or if your pet is having multiple seizures in one day or a prolonged seizure that is not stopping.

WHAT CAUSES SEIZURES?

Seizures are induced by rapid-fire repeated transmissions of brain cells. This may have many causes, including low blood sugar; toxins; hormone imbalances; liver problems; and brain abnormalities including traumatic injury, birth defects, tumors, or infections. Most commonly, however, we do not know the cause. When we do not find an underlying cause, and seizures are recurrent, this is called *epilepsy*.

When a seizure is suspected, we take a thorough history to be sure about what is actually happening. Sometimes heart problems or other diseases can produce signs that look like seizures. The veterinarian will perform a physical examination, a basic selection of blood tests, and possibly an electrocardiogram (EKG). These tests look for disorders of the liver, kidneys, heart, electrolytes, blood sugar level, and thyroid hormone level. If you are interested, you can be referred to a veterinary neurologist, where further diagnostics may be performed, such as a spinal tap, a CAT scan or an MRI.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT FUTURE SEIZURES?

To help us best treat your pet, please keep a record of the episodes, including the following information:

- date and time of seizures, including time of day
- length of seizures
- any pre-seizure behavior or possible cause of the seizure episode
- doses and timing of medication, if any

While epilepsy cannot be cured, it can usually be well-controlled with daily oral medication. Treatment is usually indicated if seizures occur more frequently than once a month, if clusters of seizures are seen within a short time span, or if seizures are especially long. Treatment is designed to change the pattern of epileptic episodes by greatly reducing the frequency and severity of seizures, and often stops them altogether. Side effects of medication may include sedation (this is usually only temporary, and goes away after a few weeks), and/or increases in thirst, appetite, or urination. We use periodic blood testing to check medication levels. If your pet is taking medication, it must be given consistently.

Sometimes, pets that have been seizure-free for a long time can gradually be taken off medication. It is very important to consult your veterinarian before making any changes to your pet's medication. Suddenly stopping or decreasing the medication can cause a seizure.