

Epilepsy

General Information

Epilepsy is relatively common in dogs but much less common in cats. Nerve cells in the brain function by transmission of electrical impulses. Epilepsy is a sudden, excessive discharge of electrical energy in groups of brain cells, causing a seizure or convulsion. Why this spontaneous discharge occurs we do not know, but in many cases the condition is hereditary in dogs.

Epilepsy usually becomes apparent between 6 months and 5 years of age. Nearly all breeds, including mixed breeds, have been affected.

Treatment for epilepsy does not cure the disease. Instead, treatment controls the condition by decreasing the frequency, duration and severity of seizures.

Characteristics of Seizures

Epileptic seizures seldom last more than 5 minutes, but to the unprepared observer they are extremely alarming and seem to last much longer. Handling the mouth of an animal should be avoided because you may be accidentally bitten.

Most seizures occur in three distinct phases. The first phase is called the aura and is the period before a seizure during which the affected animal seems overly anxious. It may scramble from behind a piece of furniture or jump down from a chair, with its eyes widely dilated. This phase generally lasts less than 1 minute.

The second phase is the actual seizure. Each attack may be different and can range from a mild muscle spasm to a severe convulsion, with defecation and urination. Loss of consciousness may or may not occur.

The third phase occurs immediately after the seizure and is characterized by confusion, weakness, and rapid breathing. The severity of this phase depends on the severity of the convulsion. Blindness (temporary) and total exhaustion may follow a severe episode.

Status Epilepticus

Status epilepticus is a constant seizure state. Each seizure seems to stimulate another, resulting in one seizure immediately following another. Because this condition can be fatal, call the doctor immediately! *Status epilepticus is a medical emergency.*