



## UPSTATE VETERINARY SPECIALTIES PLLC

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## SEIZURES

Seizures are the most common neurologic problem in small animal medicine. It can be scary to watch your pet having a seizure and many pet owners worry that their pet might be in pain or are suffering during a seizure. However, this is not the case, and we frequently suffer more than they do, *as long as* the seizures are short and infrequent.

Epilepsy is the most common neurologic seizure disorder of dogs and cats and can be defined as any condition that causes recurring seizures. Any patient with recurring seizures has a form of epilepsy. Epilepsy is not one single disease. When most people think of “epilepsy,” they usually think of Idiopathic Epilepsy. Idiopathic, also known as Primary Epilepsy, is a condition that likely has a genetic/hereditary cause and is common in humans, dogs, and cats and generally begins at a younger age. Unfortunately, there is no test to prove if a patient has Idiopathic Epilepsy; it is a diagnosis of exclusion. This means after ruling out other possible causes we can presume the patient has Idiopathic Epilepsy.

There is no medication or treatment that can completely “cure” Idiopathic Epilepsy. However, many patients can be successfully managed long-term with anticonvulsant medications. These medications can help by decreasing frequency, severity and/or duration of seizures. Typically, we aim for no more than one to two seizures in a 2-month period.

Symptomatic (or Secondary) epilepsy is due to an underlying identifiable disorder, such as a brain tumor or a structural abnormality, inflammation or infection in the brain, or even from low blood sugar potentially from an insulin-secreting tumor. There are many treatment options for these patients as well and vary depending on the underlying cause for seizure.



- Beagle
- Belgian shepherd
- Bernese Mountain Dog
- Border collie
- Boxer
- Cocker spaniel
- Collie
- Dachshund
- Dalmatian
- English Springer Spaniel
- Finnish Spitz
- German shepherd
- Golden Retriever
- Irish Setter
- Irish Wolfhound
- Keeshond
- Labrador Retriever
- Lagotto Romagnolo
- Miniature Schnauzer
- Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever
- Saint Bernard
- Siberian Husky
- Standard Poodle
- Vizsla



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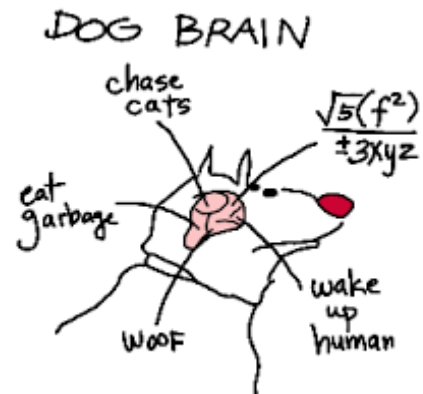
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## SO, WHAT IS A “SEIZURE” ANYWAY?

A seizure is a transient, self-limiting, physical manifestation of chaotic electrical activity in the brain. Our brain cells communicate with each other via excitatory and inhibitory electrical and chemical signals. When one area of the brain starts to become too excited, surrounding areas try to quiet the overexcited region. With a seizure, however, the overactive area of the brain either overrides this negative feedback or the negative feedback doesn't occur.

This is why seizures can vary widely in appearance, as it depends on what area of the brain is overactive. If the electrical activity stays in one region of the brain, only a portion of the body will be affected, such as focal facial seizures. Many people know of or have seen a classic “grand mal” type of seizure. This is a type of generalized seizure where the excessive electrical activity occurs on both sides of the brain, so both sides of the body are affected. With this type of seizure, the patient loses consciousness, falls over to its side to seize and has stiff or paddling limbs. Some patients will have the mouth wide open or make jaw chomping motions. Drooling, urination, and/or defecation may occur. Patients may make noise or vocalize during a seizure, but this is not due to pain. Sometimes, the seizure will start as a focal seizure involving only one portion of the body but then generalize to involve the entire body.



When your pet has a seizure, DON'T PANIC! Yes, that's easier said than done! It is very uncommon for a pet to die during or directly because of a seizure. Seizures are usually short and stop by themselves, lasting about 2-3 minutes on average. You DO NOT NEED TO DO ANYTHING other than keep your pet safe. Pull them away from the top of the stairs, furniture or ledge if needed so they don't fall. Do not put your hands near your pet's mouth as they may unknowingly bite you and cause injury. Despite popular belief, they will not swallow their tongue! Do not try to cuddle or hold your pet. Dogs and cats are sometimes aggressive during or after a seizure, as much as we want to help them, it's best to let them be.



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## WHEN DOES A SEIZURE BECOME AN EMERGENCY?

There are two situations that require immediate emergency treatment. The first is any active seizure lasting longer than 5 minutes. This is called *Status Epilepticus*. We start to worry about irreversible brain changes when the active seizure phase lasts longer than 30 minutes. The second emergency situation is cluster seizures, in which there are 2 or more seizures in a 24-hour period. These clusters can become life-threatening because they can progress into status epilepticus.

## LOGGING YOUR PETS SEIZURE ACTIVITY

We recommend that you keep a journal or logbook documenting all of your pet's seizures, including time of day, duration, any potential triggers, what the seizure looked like, severity, etc. Bring the logbook with you to your veterinary appointment. With everyone's busy schedules these days, it can sometimes be difficult to remember the details of the seizures with any accuracy. The logbook with all these details can be very important and greatly assists the veterinarian with decision-making regarding recommended tests and medications.

Another option is to download the [Royal Veterinary College Pet Epilepsy Tracker](#) app on your phone. This app has a seizure log data function along with medication logs and the option for medication reminders.





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## WHEN SHOULD ANTICONVULSANT MEDICATIONS BE IMPLEMENTED?

In general, most neurologists recommend starting an anticonvulsant if there is more than one seizure every 2 months or if there is an underlying progressive disorder as a cause for the seizures. We also start anticonvulsants immediately in any patient that has status epilepticus or cluster seizures from the beginning. There are many medication options available that are very safe if used and monitored appropriately. Approximately 75-80% of dogs with Idiopathic Epilepsy can be controlled with one or two anticonvulsants. By “controlled” we mean no more than one seizure every 2 months or so. It’s possible that the seizures stop entirely with medication(s), but most patients continue to have seizures from time to time. About 25% of dogs can have refractory epilepsy, meaning seizures are difficult to control. Our goal is to give your pet the best quality of life by reducing the seizure frequency, duration, and severity as much as possible while minimizing side effects of medications.