

Seizures

A seizure is defined as a transitory disturbance of brain function that has a sudden onset, stops spontaneously and has a tendency to recur. Epilepsy is a common recurrent seizure disorder seen in young dogs age 3 to 5 years at onset. Generalized seizures affect the entire body. Commonly dogs will fall over and make paddling movements with the limbs, salivate and become incontinent. Seizures usually last less than 90 seconds. Some dogs will have focal seizures which are localized to one body region.

Seizures do not hurt a dog but can be very scary to watch. It is important that owners do not put their hands near the dogs mouth as they may bite without knowing what they are doing. Most seizures are very short but can seem to last a long time, so noting the time on a clock, to give accurate information on duration, is important. Make sure your dog cannot hurt itself by falling and talk calmly. The seizure should end on its own however the dog may act “weird” for a few minutes to hours after the seizure. If the seizure does not end after 1 to 3 minutes or the dog has multiple seizures in a row emergency help is needed. Please call the office or go to the nearest emergency clinic quickly. A dog can become overheated very quickly if having long or repeated seizures.

Many diseases can cause seizures. If we can rule out all metabolic, toxic and structural causes then we have epilepsy. When a dog is presented to our clinic for seizures we will ask questions about when and how the episode occurred. We will recommend a blood panel to help rule out other causes and a complete exam to determine if any other neurologic signs are present. If the animal is young and otherwise healthy we may monitor the type and number of seizures for a while or recommend starting treatment.

If a dog is started on medication for treatment of seizures then they will need to be monitored frequently for appropriate dosing via blood tests, initially every 3 to 4 weeks then every 6 to 12 months. Sometimes more than one medication is needed to control the seizures. The goal of treatment is to restrict seizures to no more than one monthly. Dogs can live out a full, normal life with seizures if they are appropriately controlled.