

## Golden Rules of Treatment

- Always follow the instructions on the label. Both the dose rate and the timing of the medication is important to maintain adequate drug levels within the bloodstream.
- Never run out of medication. Sudden withdrawal may cause severe seizures.
- Be careful with medications as they are powerful sedatives.
- Do not give any other medications than those prescribed for your pet without first consulting your veterinarian. Even herbal remedies may be dangerous.

### **Client information series**

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## Seizures in dogs and cats

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# General information

Seizures and epilepsy are less commonly encountered in cats than in dogs. They are, however, the most common sign of disease affecting the front part of the brain in the cat.

## TERMS and DEFINITIONS

- Seizure- (convulsion, icterus, fit). An involuntary disturbance of normal brain control, usually seen as uncontrollable muscle activity. Seizures may be single and occasional, or may occur in clusters.
- Epilepsy– recurrent seizures usually without an identifiable cause.
- Preictal-(aura) The change in character that occurs prior to a fit. E.g. Nervousness, attention seeking, head turning.
- Postictal– following seizures it may take 24-48 hours for return to normal behaviour. There may be a variety of signs including sleepiness, pacing, depression, excessive eating and thirst and sometimes blindness.
- General Seizures– jerking convulsing movements, paddling, loss of urinary and faecal control.
- Status Epilepticus– continuous fitting for more than 5-10 minutes. Require urgent

treatment.

- Partial seizures– seen in dogs more frequently than cats, these fits may involve only certain parts of the body, or be seen as character changes (tail chasing, biting at imaginary objects, aggression)
- Absence seizures-(petit mal) almost never seen in cats, these seizures are almost undetectable.

Seizures occur at times of changing brain activity e.g. During phases of sleep, feeding or excitement. Most animals seem completely normal between fits. Many different diseases are able to induce seizures. Diagnostic testing to try to discover a cause is most likely to lead to successful treatment. Idiopathic epilepsy which occurs frequently in dogs is very rare in cats.

## Diagnosis

Diagnosis is made on the basis of history and clinical signs. Diagnostic tests such as blood tests are almost always required. Sometimes x rays and spinal taps may be necessary for an accurate diagnosis. Procedures such as CT and MRI scans are also available at some specialist centers.

## Treatment

Treatment is recommended for any dog or cat who has regular fits (more than one every 6-8 weeks), those whose fits are prolonged or

those which have a prolonged postictal stage. If fitting is not controlled it may lead to brain cell damage which is irreversible. Where ever possible, the cause of the fits needs to be directly treated. Unfortunately, a large number of cases never have the cause diagnosed. These cases need to have treatment directly aimed at controlling the fit episodes. There are a variety of drugs available for this. The one chosen will depend on each individual case. Several changes in dose rate, timing and even medication may be needed before the condition is stabilised. Even with treatment, it is not possible to completely prevent seizure episodes. Often the aim is to reduce frequency and severity of the fits to allow for a more normal life. Some cases are uncontrollable even with medication.

Regular blood tests are required to monitor the levels of medication in the blood stream and allow for dose changes. There are occasional side effects with medication and blood tests to monitor these are also needed. The most common side effects of medication are sedation (especially at the beginning of treatment-this wears off), increased thirst and lethargy.

Any side effects noted should be reported to your veterinarian as it may mean an need alteration in medication is required.