

Why does epilepsy occur?

No one really knows why true epilepsy occurs. Your veterinary surgeon may first wish to rule out other causes of the seizures, as they can occur for reasons other than epilepsy.

Inheritance has been shown to play an important role in true canine epilepsy for certain breeds. Breeds that seem particularly susceptible to epilepsy include the German Shepherd, Poodle, Irish Setter, Labrador, Golden Retriever, Welsh Springer Spaniel and American Cocker Spaniel.


In some breeds, particularly the Labrador and Golden Retriever, the incidence of epilepsy is higher in the male dogs than the female.

Is my dog in pain during a seizure?

Most epileptic dogs are unconscious during a seizure and experience only a few minor aches and pains afterwards. Canine seizures tend to be far more 'painful' for the owner than the pet.

Is there a cure?

Unfortunately, there is no cure for epilepsy and an epileptic dog will always be at risk of having a seizure. Yet, treatment can be very successful, most often resulting in reduced frequency, duration or severity of seizures, but sometimes stopping the seizures from occurring altogether.



Remember: most epileptic dogs can live a long and happy life and in some cases it may even be possible to wean a dog off treatment. However, treatment should not be altered without prior consultation with your veterinary surgeon and it is essential that your dog receives the treatment prescribed.

Further information is available from your veterinary surgeon.

Also, visit: www.canineepilepsy.co.uk for more epilepsy information

What should I do if my dog has a seizure?

Once your dog is having a seizure, there are actions you can take to protect yourself and your dog from harm.

Dogs do not seem to swallow their tongues during a seizure, so there is no need to put your hand near your dog's mouth and risk being accidentally bitten.

Where possible, move objects, people and other pets out of the way and do not move or handle your dog during a seizure unless he/she is likely to damage themselves (e.g. if at the top of the stairs or near a fire. If this is the case, roll him/her onto a blanket and pull clear of harm).

Once the seizure is over, keep your dog in a quietened room to fully recover. Your dog may be confused and disorientated after a seizure, so avoid approaching him/her until he/she is ready to come to you. Ensure that food and water are available as your dog may also be hungry and thirsty after a seizure.

It is a good idea to time and record details of the seizure, as this will help your veterinary surgeon to establish the best course of treatment for your dog. If the seizure is lasting longer than normal, for more than 10 minutes or if seizures are occurring more often than one per hour, you should contact your veterinary surgeon immediately.

Can I do anything to prevent epilepsy?

There are some measures that can be taken to reduce the incidence of canine epilepsy. If you have an epileptic dog, it would be unwise to breed from him or repeat the mating that produced him, as there is thought to be a strong hereditary factor with epilepsy. The same applies to an epileptic bitch.

Additionally, as the frequency of seizures of a female epileptic dog can increase around the time of her season, it may be advisable to have her spayed.

Why should epilepsy be treated?

Seizures can be both upsetting and inconvenient for the owners of an epileptic dog, but most dogs enjoy a high quality of life when treated. In addition to the obvious distress to yourself when you witness a seizure, there are sound medical reasons for treating epilepsy. The time your dog spends in a seizure can cause damage or loss of brain cells and may lead to a loss of personality over time. Also, each time a seizure occurs, the likelihood of the dog having additional seizures increases.



When should epilepsy be treated?

This should be discussed with your veterinary surgeon, but some guidelines for treatment are:

- If seizures occurs more frequently than once every 4 - 6 weeks.
- If seizures occur in clusters (several in one day).
- If seizures last longer than 5 - 10 minutes.

What can I expect from treatment?

Each dog responds differently to anticonvulsant therapy. Although complete elimination of seizures is desirable, it is not always possible. Treatment is considered to be successful where seizures are reduced in frequency, duration and/or severity.

Guidelines for therapy

1. Effectiveness of treatment should not be judged for at least 2 weeks after it has started, as the medication must be given a chance to work.
2. It is normal for your veterinary surgeon to start treatment at a lower dose rate and gradually increase it to find the most suitable dose for your dog. It is possible that one or more blood tests will be needed to help with these adjustments.
3. Regular blood tests will be required to monitor therapy.
4. Medication should not be changed or stopped suddenly as this may cause a state of continuous seizing.
5. Medication may be required twice daily for life.
6. No single drug or drug combination works in all cases and each dog must be treated individually.

Adjustments in dose and frequency of administration may be required and should only be done under the guidance of your veterinary surgeon.
7. It is important to keep a record of the dates and times that seizures occur. This will help your veterinary surgeon to make the dose adjustments necessary to find the best dose level for your dog.
8. Drugs should be stored in a safe place, out of the reach of children.

