

Home Care for the Seizure Patient



Enjoy life with your pet - live with epilepsy and not for it. With appropriate treatment, most animals have more good days than bad and most epileptics live relatively normal lives. However, even the best controlled pets will still have some seizures, and the aim of treatment is to keep these to a tolerable level.

There is no need to restrict your pet's exercise or to go out of your way to reduce the level of excitement in your pet's life - a seizure patient is no more likely to experience an episode with excitement than is a "normal" animal. In fact, seizures have been reported to occur most commonly when animals are relaxed and quiet, and many owners report that their pet was sleeping peacefully when the episode began.

Control Tips

For the best possible control of a seizure patient, it is important that a fairly strict treatment regime is followed at home, if more than one person will be involved in giving the daily treatment, it may be easiest to buy a pillbox with individual compartments for each day of the week. It's then easy to see at a glance whether the necessary treatments have been given. Keep a close watch on the amount of medication left and be sure to order more well ahead of the required time to avoid missing doses. Animals receiving medication to control seizures become dependent on that medication, so missing a dose will often precipitate seizure activity.

If your pet vomits immediately after you've given their medication, wait for about 1 hour then give another dose, if vomiting continues, contact your vet so that alternative means of medication can be given and the problem treated. If at any stage you're unsure of whether to give another dose after your pet has vomited, please call for advice.

if you're going away and need to leave your pet in the care of friends or at boarding kennels, be sure to leave clear instructions for the carer with regards to medication requirements. It's also a good idea to leave your vet's contact details with the carer, and to inform your vet of the arrangements you've made should any problems arise.

Your vet will need to monitor the drug levels in your pet's blood on a regular basis, to ensure these values are within the appropriate therapeutic range. These tests also mean that accurate records of effective dosing regimes can be kept and referred to if changes to medication become necessary at any time. Blood tests are usually done just prior to the pet's normal dosing time, so that the lowest effective levels of the drug can be measured - your vet will advise you of the best time to make the appointment. They may ask that you don't feed your pet before the tests, in order to get a more accurate result.

Be Prepared

Start thinking now about what to do if your pet has a seizure at home. Decide on one place to keep any medications your vet may have given for this situation (e.g. diazepam) and ensure everyone involved in the animal's care knows where they are kept and how to give them. Look around the dog's environment and think of possible areas you may want to shut off so that your pet can't injure themselves during seizure or post-ictal activity - this can include stairways, swimming pools, terraced gardens etc. If you have other pets at home it is important to keep them away from your pet during seizures as they may become confused and aggressive towards the seizing animal.

Possible Drug Side Effects

Most animals experience very few side effects, and if they do occur, the effects are usually mild and far outweighed by the risk of ongoing seizures if treatment is withheld.

Some animals may become lethargic and want to sleep more due to the sedative effect of the medications used to control seizure activity. Changes in gait may also be seen, with general coordination affected so that animals appear to stumble and weave while walking. If the changes observed are mild, it is often best to wait this adjustment period out. Most animals develop tolerance to the drugs in about 1 week, so that signs will gradually disappear. When animals are more severely affected, it may be necessary to adjust the dose of medication to minimise these side effects -however, always talk to your vet before making any changes to your pet's medication.

The opposite behavioural changes have also been reported as a side effect of seizure medications -these include restlessness, pacing and agitation. Again, a change in dosage may need to be discussed with your vet to alleviate these signs.

Some animals will experience an increase in thirst and appetite due to their medication - ensure your pet has access to appropriate areas for urination when required, and monitor their weight regularly so that any adjustments to diet may be made before obesity becomes a problem. Always ensure your pet receives a high quality, balanced diet.

More serious side effects are uncommon, but can include liver and bone marrow damage. Annual blood tests are usually performed to monitor your pet's health during treatment, but in some cases your vet may recommend more frequent checks.

What to do when seizures occur

Don't panic - most seizures are very brief many animals experience an aura or prodrome prior to full seizure activity -this is usually seen as a recognisable change in behaviour. Patients may be upset or anxious, they may seek attention or withdraw and hide. In some cases these signs may go unnoticed and the owner will have no indication of an impending episode.

Watch your pet carefully and make sure they are safe from self trauma and are not at risk of falling from furniture or stairs. Seizing animals will not swallow their tongue, but may "chomp" involuntarily -keep your hands away from their mouth during this period to avoid being bitten accidentally.

If you have been prescribed diazepam for your pet, administer this as per your vet's instructions, if an oral form has been given, ensure the animal is awake enough to swallow this and aware enough not to bite you.

Time the seizure and if possible, write a description of your pet's behaviour before, during and after the seizure. Note the date seizures occur, and take these records with you for your pet's next check up - this helps to determine whether treatment goals are being met.

If seizures last for longer than 10 minutes, or the patient suffers more than 3 seizures in one day, seek immediate veterinary attention for your pet - there is a serious risk of brain damage within 30 minutes if seizure activity is allowed to continue.

Try to distinguish post-ictal behaviour from seizures. After seizure activity has ceased, animals may enter a post-ictal phase manifested by varying signs such as apparent blindness and bumping into objects, a ravenous appetite, and in some cases, uncharacteristic aggression. These signs may last for a few hours and sometimes up to 1 or 2 days or more. It is important to ensure that children are warned not to try and hug their pet to comfort it during this time, particularly when aggressive behaviour is displayed

it's usually best to leave your pet alone in a quiet place where it's unlikely to be able to injure itself or others, until it recovers from the post-ictal signs.

If the post-ictal signs are very prolonged or severe, and your pet is at risk of self injury or becomes very aggressive, arrange a consultation with your vet as soon as possible.

Summary

- Be prepared:
 - set place for medications
 - safe environment

- e Watch for signs of seizure - may show behavioural change

- « When seizure occurs.
 - note time
 - secure safe environment for pet
 - ensure own safety -+ don't get bitten
 - administer drugs as per vet instructions
 - write description of what occurred, date, time and length of seizure keep in quiet place until recovers from post-ictal signs (hours -+ 2 days)

- if seizure lasts > 10 min or patient suffers >3 in one day seek immediate veterinary attention

- If post-ictal signs prolonged or severe - arrange a vet consult as soon as possible.