

SEIZURES

Seizures (convulsions, fits, epilepsy) are commonly encountered in our household pets, but can be frightening, nonetheless. They can occur in dogs and cats of all ages and are caused by many different problems. In general, seizures are caused by two major groups of problems:

I. PROBLEMS ORIGINATING IN THE BRAIN ITSELF, SUCH AS:

True epilepsy, brain infections (virus, bacteria, fungus), degenerative conditions of brain tissue, hydrocephalus (water on the brain), brain tumors, strokes and blood clots in the brain.

II. PROBLEMS NOT ORIGINATING IN THE BRAIN, SUCH AS:

Poisons, kidney disease, liver disease, heart disease, low blood sugar, nerve and muscle problems, infections.

As you can see, a seizure is not a diagnosis in itself, but a sign of an underlying problem. After one such episode, it is usually difficult to tell whether your pet will ever have another fit or not. A thorough history-taking and physical exam will provide your doctor with quite a bit of information, but often some simple test procedures are necessary to study your pet's problem more closely. These initial tests may include blood tests, urine analysis and an electrocardiogram. The purpose of these tests is to tell whether the problem originates from other parts of the body (Group II) or from the brain (Group I). These are important to distinguish, as the prognosis and kinds of medication used for these diseases are different.

In most cases, we look for normal test results - this may suggest that the problem is in the brain. At this point, your doctor may prescribe medication, or he may recommend further tests. Many human-type tests are performed on pets as well, such as cerebrospinal fluid analysis, skull x-rays, electroencephalograms, brain scans with radioactive isotopes and x-ray dye-injection studies of the brain's blood supply. Your veterinarian will determine whether or not your pet requires these further tests and can explain them to you.

The important point is to identify the seizure problem as closely and as early as possible so that appropriate therapeutic measures can be taken. There are literally thousands upon thousands of happy household pets that are epileptic, and many can lead long, normal lives.

If you have any questions about epilepsy in your pet, consult your veterinarian.

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