

Seizures

What is a seizure?

A seizure is a sudden, abnormal discharge of electrical activity in a group of brain cells. Seizures are one of the most frequently seen neurological problems in dogs. During a seizure, animals may experience all or a combination of the following:

- Loss of consciousness
- Contraction of muscles
- Changes in mental awareness
- Involuntary urination, defecation, or salivation
- Behavioral changes

What are the phases of a seizure?

Seizures consist of three components.

1. The *pre-ictal phase* is the period just before the seizure where you may detect subtle changes in behavior.
2. The *ictal phase* is the seizure itself and lasts for a few seconds to minutes.
3. The *post-ictal phase* immediately follows the seizure and is marked by confusion, weakness, and temporary blindness. This phase may last minutes to an hour.

What can I do to help my dog during the seizure?

Dogs do not swallow their tongues. Do not put your hand into its mouth. Move objects and furniture from the dog's path. Block access to swimming pools to prevent drowning.

****Status epilepticus is a prolonged seizure lasting more than five minutes. If this occurs, the dog's life is endangered. You should seek veterinary treatment immediately.****

What causes seizures?

Many diseases may cause seizures. Some of the more common causes of seizures include:

- Epilepsy
- Toxin Exposure
- Liver Disease
- Distemper Virus
- Valley Fever
- Bacterial Infection
- Tick Fever
- Low Blood Sugar
- Brain Tumor

To help us determine the cause, we begin with a physical exam and blood tests. If these tests are normal, a consultation with the veterinary neurologist may be recommended to determine the exact cause of the seizures. The neurologist may do a spinal tap or MRI.

What can be done to prevent future seizures?

Any underlying disease should be treated if possible. While seizures may be impossible to completely eliminate, the goal of anticonvulsant medication is to reduce the severity and frequency of the seizures. The dog may be on medication for life. Bloodwork and monitoring of drug levels must be done as well. We do not recommend starting treatment until seizures occur more than once every 30 days, last more than 5 minutes, or the pet has multiple seizures (clusters) in a day.