

Seizures in dogs

Overview

EMERGENCY

Call your vet immediately if your dog has been having a seizure for longer than 5 minutes or they have had more than one seizure in a row.

A seizure (often called a 'fit') is faulty electrical activity in the brain which causes your dog to lose control of their body. Seizures vary a lot in how they look and how long they last (from a few seconds to many minutes).

Seizures can be caused by poisons, injury, illness and epilepsy. Some dogs will have an unexplained 'one off' seizure and never have another. Other dogs continue to have seizures throughout their life, this is often due to epilepsy or illness.

It can be very frightening to witness a seizure. Check out our short video on '**What to do if your dog is having a seizure**'.

Treatment for seizures depends on the cause, some dogs need lifelong treatment to control their condition.

Always let your vet know if your dog has had a seizure.

First aid for a seizure

- Don't panic
- Don't go near their mouth as they may accidentally bite
- If necessary, move them to a safe area where they can't hurt themselves
- Turn the lights off

- Make the room as quiet as possible
- Start timing the seizure and make a note of how long it lasts
- Phone your vet for advice
- Try to avoid transporting a fitting dog to the vets, wait until they have come out of their seizure (unless your vet advises otherwise)

What does a seizure look like?

Not all seizures look the same, some affect the whole body and others only affect parts of it. You may notice the following:

- Muscle twitching (anywhere in the body)
- A vacant expression and no response when spoken to
- Uncontrolled, jerking movements
- Paddling movements with the legs
- Collapse and loss of consciousness
- Passing urine or faeces
- Drooling or frothing at the mouth
- Tense/cramped muscles
- Eyes rolling back or moving side to side

Causes

There are many possible causes of seizures, including:

Epilepsy

- Epilepsy is a very common cause of seizures in dogs between 6 months and 6 years old.
- Epilepsy is often due to a fault in their DNA and is more common in certain pedigree dogs such as the Border collie.

Poisons

- Poisons such as caffeine, chocolate and slug bait can cause seizures.

Head injury

- Any damage to the head (such as a road accident or a fall) can cause seizures.

Blood sugar level

- Very low sugar levels in the blood can cause seizures, diabetic dogs and very young puppies that haven't eaten for a period of time are at risk of this.

Liver disease

- Seizures can happen if the liver is unable to remove toxins from the blood because of liver disease.
- This is a common cause of seizures in very young puppies (from a few weeks old) due to a condition called a portosystemic shunt and also in older dogs due to severe liver disease.

Lungworm

- Lungworm is a worm (parasite) that can live in the heart, lungs and sometimes the brain.
- Seizures can be a symptom of lungworm in the brain.
- Regular deworming will prevent this.

Tumours

- Although rare, tumours in the brain cause seizures.
- This is much more common in dogs over 6years old, seizures in young dogs are very unlikely to be caused by tumours.

When to contact your vet

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Call your vet immediately if your dog has been having a seizure for longer than 5 minutes or they have had more than one seizure in a row.

Always call your vet for advice if your dog has had a seizure even if they have recovered and seem perfectly normal. Always let your vet know if your dog is still having fits whilst on medication to control them.

Your vet may ask you to bring your dog in for a check-up or they may make a note on their record and ask you to come in if it happens again. Keep a 'seizure diary', note down when each seizure happens, how it lasted for and what happened during it (i.e. did they poo and pee?)

You know your dog best. If you are concerned it's always best to contact your vet.

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