



be up and wagging, not tucked.) Pets may be terrified when they are in the immediate post-seizure period, and may react aggressively to your attempts to console or comfort. The temptation to hold your pet post seizure is overwhelming, but resist the temptation! If possible, gently usher the pet into a confined area, such as a crate or small room, while you make the phone call to us.

### **Is my pet going to die during a seizure?**

Thankfully, it is rare that a pet or person dies during a seizure. If a seizure goes on for longer than thirty minutes (called status epilepticus), complications can occur, and these complications are fatal in approximately ten percent of the cases. Most seizures are short-lived, lasting less than five minutes, and complications of these short seizures are extremely rare. Try to remember to time each seizure; it seems like it lasts forever, but it is usually only thirty seconds to three minutes long. Do not count the post-seizure period, only the seizure itself. Log the date and length of each seizure or note it on a calendar so we can monitor the frequency and severity of the seizures.

### **What is wrong with my pet?**

It is impossible to determine the cause of a seizure without diagnostic tests. A pet who has had a single short seizure should see us for routine testing. Simple blood tests will help determine if the seizure was caused by low blood sugar, toxicity, or organ failure. Normal blood tests will help to rule out the possibility of some diseases. Most of the time these tests will be normal and we will assume the pet has epilepsy if it is a dog.

### **Does my pet have epilepsy?**

Epilepsy is the most common cause of seizures in dogs. Epilepsy simply means that there is not a serious or progressive underlying disease causing your pet's seizures. In order to determine if your pet is epileptic, a series of tests must be done to eliminate other causes of seizures.

Epilepsy is uncommon in cats. Seizures in cats are much more likely to be due to a serious disease or problem, most commonly brain tumors.

### **Does my pet need medication?**

When a pet appears to be developing a pattern of seizures, and no underlying disease has been found, antiepileptic drugs may be recommended. In general, if a pet is seizing more often than twice a month, or if the seizures are prolonged (greater than five to ten minutes) or occurring in clusters, it may be time to start anti-seizure medications. Seizures occurring after head trauma or because of a brain tumor should always be treated with medication right away.

### **What medication does my pet need?**

Phenobarbital has been the mainstay of epileptic management for decades but we usually try newer medications with fewer side effects nowadays, at least for dogs. Cats often do well on phenobarbital and we don't have much experience with the newer medications in cats. It is common for a dog to need more than one medication and we often try several dosages or drug combinations to find what works best for a particular dog.

There are therapeutic diets available to help prevent seizures as well. Many dogs have much better seizure control on a special diet.

**How often do I need to see the veterinarian?**

This will depend on what ant-seizure medications we use. Some drugs need to be adjusted and monitored with blood testing. If a pet's seizures are worsening we will probably refer you to a neurologist, who will then decide on what rechecks are necessary.

**Can my pet be left alone after having a seizure?**

If at all possible, it is best for a pet to be observed for the first twenty-four hours after his first seizure. Once a diagnosis has been established, and your pet is on medication, it is unlikely he will require any special supervision.

**Can I discontinue my pet's medication if the seizures stop?**

Most epileptics require medication for life. Occasionally, the seizures decrease in frequency and intensity, and the medications can be reduced. It is very important that this be done only under your veterinarian's advice, as lowering the medications too rapidly can cause the seizures to get much worse.

**Does my pet need to see a specialist?**

If your pet has been determined to have other neurologic or behavioral signs in addition to the seizures, he should probably see a specialist. Most cats with seizures have an underlying disease that should be diagnosed. The average epileptic dog is young, has short seizures, and is completely normal in between them. These dogs rarely need to see a specialist, unless you are especially concerned. If the seizures are difficult to control, a specialist can often help to adjust medication. If you are feeling frustrated with your pet's seizure control, or are not sure if there is an underlying problem, a specialist may be able to help. It is extremely rare that epileptic seizures cannot be controlled enough to allow good quality of life for you and your pet.