

EPILEPSY AND YOUR PET

by Cat Donnelly, Pet Nutritional Consultant

Seizures and epilepsy have become a very common problem in veterinary medicine. Many holistic and homeopathic veterinarians list vaccinations as the most frequent cause of seizure activity, though other toxins, certain diseases, diet, and even parasites or head injury could be other contributing factors or causes as well. Hopefully this article will help you demystify what is going on with your pet.

COMMON TYPES OF SEIZURES:

There are two basic types of epilepsy. Infrequent Petit Mal or "partial motor" seizures, are a less severe form of epilepsy that usually only affects a specific group of muscles, like the front paws for instance. Grand Mal, or "major motor" seizures are more severe and can include a complete loss of consciousness and gross body movements. All seizures are hard on your pet, but a lot can be done to try and understand and control them.

During a seizure the most common symptoms are:

Stiffening Muscles
Losing consciousness
Urinating
Salivating
Jerking intermittently

A seizure may last one to five minutes or more, and afterward the pet may be exhausted, confused and disoriented for minutes, or even hours. There may be a residual lack of coordination, or other signs of neurological malfunction (pupils staying dilated, etc.).

So far, experiments and case studies involving MANY breeds of dogs and cats have failed to prove a genetic link to Epilepsy. This contradicts the usual allopathic (traditional veterinary medicine's) belief that it is a genetic problem. After copious tests, the diagnosis is usually "illioathic," or having no known cause. Blood tests are always recommended, however, because it is possible to find a sub-clinical disease that needs to be taken care of.

It is unlikely that a five year old pet has true epilepsy if the seizures began at the age of 5, and in fact much less than 10% of cases are what is considered "true epilepsy," or having an organic (true genetic) cause. If I were to invoke one word to be connected to this disease, it would be 'toxins.' If you think about it, we chemically worm our pups at a very tender age, repeatedly jab them with chemical vaccines, put them on internal heartworm preventative and external flea and tick preventatives, and we feed them foods with harmful preservatives.

Would we do that with our human babies? Remember, when the chemicals are ingested for whatever reason, they have to go somewhere, and that is usually the liver, kidney and other cleansing organs.

I think it's safe to say that most of our beloved pets are chemically damaged by the time they reach adulthood. These chemicals are big business in the United States and the growth of this industry has coincided with a decrease in our pet's overall health. Therefore, epilepsy is only the minor symptom of the bigger problem.

MAJOR CAUSES and COMMON TRIGGERS OF SEIZURES:

Below is a list of things that most commonly cause seizures. This does NOT necessarily mean your pet will have a seizure each time it comes in contact with one of the items listed below. EACH pet is different and therefore results will vary.

Injury:

Head trauma may lead to convulsive seizures due to inflammation of the brain/spinal cord. Yucca Intensive is usually very helpful in these cases because of its natural anti-inflammatory properties.

Electrical Charges:

Wool blankets, sofas, and carpets can trigger seizures by conducting electrical charges.

Stress:

Stress can include having company over, being home alone, abuse, neglect, the mailman's visit, visiting the vet, not having a consistent routine, loud noises, yelling, fighting, doorbell ringing, thunder, loud music, new addition to the family, new pet, going into heat, having a female in heat in the vicinity, etc. Not all pets are affected by these and other stressors the same way, and some aren't affected at all.

Stress can also be separation from the mother, relocation to a new home, neutering, immunizations, sickness, dehydration, skin problems (constant itching), ear crop or tail docking operations, chemical deworming, heartworm pills, teething, weather changes, and much more. There are many calming products listed at AlternativePets.com that could help with known stressful situations and even acute situations, like **Calm & Relax** tincture, or **Azmira's Herbal Calm** capsules. While your pet can't live in a bubble, avoiding known stressors helps, too. For pets with a chronic nervousness, I would probably first recommend **Oxyfresh's Primorje Pet**.

Overheating is a physical stress that causes inflammation of the brain and spinal cord, causing seizures and if not reversed, can quickly lead to death. If this occurs, immediately immerse your dog in cold water, wrap in wet towels and call your regular or emergency vet right away.

Dietary Concerns:

Low quality commercial canned food, dry food, dog biscuits and treats contain toxins and cause often sub-clinical nutritional deficiencies. A diet containing excess Salt, Ferrous Sulfate, Copper Sulfate, Calcium Iodate, Monosodium Glutamate (MSG), or Sugar (sucrose, corn syrup, molasses, cane sugar) can be very harmful. Low quality diets can also contain by-products, meat meal, caramel coloring, flours (wheat flour, rice flour), fillers (corn cob, ground peanut hulls), artificial color, and/or artificial flavorings. Most supermarket foods have many of the above ingredients, not to mention that their ingredients are not human grade and are highly undigestible to your pet.

Only being fed once a day causes low blood sugar (See Hypoglycemic Feeding Schedule) which can cause or worsen seizures, even if other triggers are present. Semi-moist foods, which can contain up to 22 percent sugar, are the worst because sugar depletes the body of important vitamins and minerals and causes dangerous highs and lows in blood glucose levels.

Sodium nitrate/nitrite (a very common food preservative in pet and human food) is found to produce epileptic-like changes in the brain activity of rats who ate it regularly. Other toxic, chemical preservatives (BHA, BHT, propylene glycol and ethoxyquin) used in pet foods are products that were developed as herbicides, pesticides and to keep rubber tires supple, and don't belong in your pet's food.

Contamination from lead is a serious environmental problem. There is an added exposure risk for animals who eat canned food because the solder used in the manufacturing of cans sometimes leaches lead into the food. Lead affects the nervous system, kidneys, red blood cells, and enzymatic system. By regularly supplementing your pet's daily diet with vitamins and minerals, including extra vitamin C, you can neutralize the effects of lead intake, and keep your pet's immune system strong. A good substitute for pets who need a moist food would be home-prepared, or Flint River Ranch's Dry Water Recipe.

In summation:

There are many causes of epilepsy but a low quality diet is a major contributing factor. Handling this disease is immensely easier when the whole body is working towards the common cause of maintaining health, and is not working in a malnutritive state. Following the glycemic feeding schedule (to follow) and improving your pet's nutrition will probably make the biggest impact on seizure control.

Seasons and Other Bizarre Findings:

Research studies have shown that more seizures occur in the fall, due to mold and bacteria in the air. Certain other months have high seizure occurrences as well probably due to mold/pollen and differences in light and darkness. Sometimes they will concur with the full moon. It's good to start keeping a record of the seizures to see if a pattern develops. Daily diaries are helpful in pets who seizure frequently.

Blinking/flickering lights, ie. Christmas lights, strobe lights, lightning, television, etc. are known to trigger seizures. This is something that should be avoided in sensitive pets.

Toxins:

Kidney or liver disease, whether chronic or acute, are both usually related to toxicity. Many other diseases such as infections, fatty cell tumors, cysts, cancer or auto-immune diseases are just some other toxin-related causes to consider, some being caused by toxins, others giving off toxins. Any disease causing problems with dietary absorption or interfering with detoxification of the body (irritable bowel, etc.) can contribute to seizures as well. The good news is that there are many natural ways to detoxify the body. With a private consultation with a Purely Pets nutritional specialist, you can find a healthy way to rid the body of waste that may have accumulated over time.

A severe worm infestation, particularly roundworms, can sometimes be a cause of seizures because parasites release toxins that can have an adverse affect on the central nervous system. You pet can be dewormed naturally (see Herbal Wormers at AlternativePets.com). Healthy pets have strong immune systems that fight off worm infestations. On the other hand, chemical dewormers while killing off the current parasite infestation, also have the side effect of tearing down your pet's immune system.

Vaccinations sometimes produce an allergic encephalitis inflammation of the brain up to a few weeks after receiving it. It could be due to the proteins and organisms contained in the vaccine, as well as the known toxins used as the preservatives (mercury/Thimerisol, formaldehyde, propylene glycol, etc.) and adjuvants. Since seizuring pets are not considered "healthy," and according to the manufacturer vaccinations are only supposed to be given to healthy animals, your veterinarian should sign a health waiver exempting them from further vaccinations.

The Purdue Study asserts that the act of revaccinating our pets is causing chronic auto-immune disease, and that the first shots may give them immunity for life. Blood titres are an option to measure the amount of immunity in the blood instead of blindly vaccinating when there might be no reason to. Many vaccinations are for puppy diseases anyway (parvo, distemper) and should not be needed in an otherwise healthy adult dog.

Lead appears in various components of older houses. Apparently dogs like to lick lead because it tastes sweet, and lead poisoning can result from licking or eating wood chips from lead paint. If you suspect this may be the problem, it can be checked by doing a blood test on your pet, but you must specify that you would like a LEAD POISONING TEST which is not part of a normal blood work.

Other common toxins to avoid include:

Air fresheners -- any type

Carpet powders

Cheap ceramic dishes & plastic bowls -- All plastics release some undetectable fumes, especially when heated. This out-gassing allows fumes to pass into the foods that are served or stored in the bowl or container. Ceramic glazes might contain lead. Neither plastic nor ceramic bowls can be completely sanitized

because they are too porous. Stainless steel or glass bowls are recommended.

Chemical flea/tick control of any kind in or around your pet.

Chlorinated Water - Chlorine is a disinfectant. Use a good copper/zinc water filter for your whole family.

Cigarette smoke

Crabgrass

Dryer sheets -- if pet is exposed to clothes that have been dried with the dryer sheets.

Dust -- change air filters in your home monthly, and wash curtains regularly. Check out the air purification systems at Oxyfreshww.com (using 180606370 as distributor referral).

Excessive exercise, over-exertion, over-heating

Fabric softeners -- if pet is exposed to clothes or bedding that have fabric softener on them.

Fabric treatments containing strong scents, like Febreze

Feces - eating cat or dog feces, especially from litter boxes, or outside bird feces as well

Flea products -- (pills taken internally, shampoos, dust, collars, topical "spots, " etc.)

If the product states on the label, "Hazardous To Humans And Domestic Animals," it is hazardous to you and your pet.

Floor cleaners -- make sure the floors are dry before your pet walks on them. Pine-Sol can trigger severe seizures in many pets. A second rinse with clean water is most helpful in a lot of cases. Alternative environmentally friendly cleaners should be used for best results. See household cleaning products at Oxyfreshww.com (using 180606370 as the referring distributor).

Fumes from bleach, dusting products, other household cleaners, or paint.

Fungi

Germs/Bacteria

Hair spray -- do not spray when pet is in the same room.

Heartworm pills -- usually a seizure will occur 1 to 1 1/2 wks. after administering the pill.

Household cleaners, (see fumes, see floor cleaners)

Lyme vaccine, Lyme encephalitis

Mold

Paint: paint fumes, lead paint, cheap painted pet toys

Perfume/Cologne

Pine cleaners

Pollution from chemical plants, farm run-off

Rawhides -- very important to avoid because most are dipped in a solution of salt and bleach, or other toxins

Red food dye

Scented candles

Shampoos that contain toxins and heavy scents

Toys - plastic toys outgas, cheap toys may be painted with lead-based paint

Vitamins with high sodium level

Yard sprays to control weeds or garden pests.

In summation: Many times, diagnosing epilepsy is a process of eliminating all known possible causes of the seizures, like the ones mentioned in this article. The list above should help you also identify your pet's triggers. Your veterinarian will rule out most diseases by administering blood tests and observing the symptoms that present themselves. It's important to keep good records and be alert to changes in your pet.

TYPES OF TREATMENT:

Some drugs used in traditional treatments today are Phenobarbital, Primidone, Diazepam (Valium), Potassium Bromide, or many times a combination of two of these drugs. These drugs do nothing to cure epilepsy, they simply suppress or mask seizures. In my opinion, giving an epileptic pet powerful drugs that further toxify the body will usually make things much worse down the road.

Detoxification is crucial in truly eliminating the cause of the seizure activity if it is toxin related. When treating a seizing pet, it is important to look at the whole picture --what is causing the seizures? Once the cause is found, a PREVENTION PLAN can be initiated. A prevention plan is a simple method of enhancing the level

of nutrition and making lifestyle changes. It is something that is individualized for each seizing pet, in order to address any special needs your pet may have. For some pets, a detoxification is too stressful to start right off and other nutritional issues must be addressed before employing detoxification remedies.

Many people pursue acupuncture and/or acupressure to try to control the seizures. From what I have been told, acupressure's results were immediate. According to this person, "You could see the rigidity and the paddling cease and you could feel her relax within seconds of putting pressure on the "men-shen" point [and the pressure point in the rear paw]. While the acupuncture may have helped in preventing the frequency of her seizures, the acupressure stopped the seizure almost immediately while in process."

If you have an alternative vet in your area, this might be worth pursuing. If not, many alternative doctors for humans would be glad to try to help your pet if they are given the "map" of a dog's pressure points. This information is available in books and online.

On a similar note, canine massage has been reported to be very helpful as well. This information is available in books and on tape. If you don't have access to them before the next seizure is about to occur, you would use soft soothing strokes, and don't massage the bone (keep to the fleshy parts). You also start at the nose, always asking permission first, and proceed all the way to the tail-as long as your pet likes his tail being touched.

It is best to start a routine of canine massage before the advent of a seizure however, because for some pets, anything new would just add stress to the situation until they understood what you were doing to them. Most pets become quickly accustomed to the soothing effects of massages and welcome it eagerly. Massage is not only good for stress management, but it is also good for supporting circulation and an overall health tonic.

PREVENTION PLAN

I do not recommend discontinuing traditional medicine cold turkey or even discontinuing at all. This is YOUR decision based on how the following program works. I highly recommend you work closely with someone knowledgeable in nutrition (such as a holistic vet, pet nutritionist, etc.). Be aware that many traditional vets may not agree with the program, though some will reluctantly agree to it when you achieve positive results.

1A. DIET: A Home-prepared diet, or high quality commercial food is the cornerstone of the plan. The absolute best you can do for your pet is homemade food. There is nothing wrong with carrots, peas, salad, fruits and some grain (though grains can be somewhat controversial). Pets like variety, just as we do. I would highly recommend the following book for those looking into BARF (Biologically Appropriate Raw Food): Kymthy Schultze. Home-prepared diets like those in Dr. Pitcairn's book are also a wonderful nutritional improvement for your pet.

I have researched a lot of the pet food companies on the market, and one that I highly recommend is Flint River Ranch Lamb/Millet/Rice kibble or their Dry Water Recipe. These products are made with only human grade meats, grains, pro-biotics, and anti-oxidants. Flint River Ranch is available by calling (909) 682-5048 and telling them that you were referred by distributor # AK53 (Cat Donnelly). It is shipped to your door fresh via UPS. Be fore-warned that FRR just had a new telephone system put in and they are still working out the bugs. If you have a hard time getting through, I would be GLAD to call your order in for you!! We also highly recommend Solid Gold and Azmira pet foods.

1B. Use a good copper/zinc water filter for drinking water to filter out chlorine and other toxins.

1C. Put your pet on the Hypoglycemic feeding schedule. Hypoglycemia is a medical term meaning low blood sugar, a condition that is becoming more common in pets and especially pets suffering from seizure activity. Many epileptic pets have a seizure during the night when not fed more than once a day, and especially if they do not get a night-time snack.

The Hypoglycemic feeding schedule is as follows (adjust to your schedule as necessary):

7:00 a.m. *breakfast

11:00 a.m. **snack

3:00 p.m. **snack

7:00 p.m. *dinner

11:00 p.m. ***large snack - this should ideally be balanced in protein and carbs.

*Breakfast and dinner should be a high quality dry food or homemade meal.

**Snacks can include something FRESH or Bran crackers with peanut butter:

Celery

Carrots

Peeled apples slices

Pears

Melon

another fruit or vegetable (oranges and strawberries can produce allergic reactions)

*** For example, peeled apple slices with peanut butter in the middle, chicken & brown rice stew (ask for our easy crockpot recipes), etc.

A hypoglycemic schedule should not put weight on your pet (unless he is underweight), but helps balance out the body, and stabilize the blood sugar level, which will ultimately help control the seizures. Just as in human diets, feeding smaller meals more often will help maintain a healthy weight.

All pets having seizures should follow the above plan to rule out hypoglycemia, and increase health/vitality. If this is the problem, the seizures can be controlled through:

Feeding a high quality diet to maintain proper blood sugar levels.

Keeping stress to a minimum.

Exercising moderately but regularly.

Adding honey to the drinking water in a ratio of 1/2 tsp. honey to 2 C. of water, when gone all day and pet will not be fed.

Supplementing with high quality vitamins

MOST IMPORTANT: Feed small, frequent meals.

Symptoms of a hypoglycemic attack are as follows:

Staggering, collapsing, or becoming very weak

Becoming aggressive or moody

Staring or having a glassy look to the eyes

May go into a seizure

If this happens it is essential to administer a source of glucose. The best source of glucose is honey. In many cases the honey will immediately stop the seizure, or cut the duration dramatically. Honey, is made up of 35% protein & contains half of all the necessary amino acids. It is a highly concentrated source of many essential nutrients, including large quantities of carbohydrates (sugars), some minerals, B-complex, C, D, and E. Therefore, the honey will immediately raise the blood sugar level, putting the body in proper balance.

If honey is not available you can use jelly, karo syrup or maple syrup. Put a small amount of one of these directly into the mouth at the outer gum-line. It will be absorbed quickly. If your pet responds, you know that the cause of trigger is related to low blood sugar.

2. MULTI-VITAMINS AND MINERALS are recommended to strengthen your pet's immune system. Vitamins and Minerals help neutralize the possible harmful effects of toxins present in a pet's environment. They will also ensure against possible dietary deficiencies and provide extra nutrition in times of stress.

It may sound a little silly to buy vitamins and minerals for your pet to treat something as serious and

mysterious as epilepsy, but supplements can make a tremendous difference in improving the quality of a pet's life and making it stronger so that it can manage the disease better. Give your pet every advantage to stay as healthy as possible.

I would recommend: **Mega Pet Daily** capsules, or **Nupro liver flavored powder**.

3. VITAMIN C -- It is a myth that dogs produce enough Vitamin C in their own bodies, when actually most dogs probably have a sub-clinical case of scurvy (lack of this nutrient). Stress can quickly burn up the small amounts that they make. Medical science has described Vitamin C as one of the least toxic substances known to Man. Vitamin C enhances the absorption of calcium which is very important to dog and cat nutrition. NOTE: Pets with crystals or stones in the bladder or kidney should first consult with their veterinarian before feeding vitamin C.

I would recommend: Holistic Animal Care Super C 2000. It is human grade and is buffered for pet's sensitive stomachs.

4. EPIPLUS -- To control regular seizure activity, EpiPlus is recommended for most seizing pets, but especially for those who are on medicines to control seizures OR were about to start medicines, but are seeking less toxic alternatives. Many times this product allows you to slowly wean your pet from the traditional toxic, suppressive medicines being used, which do nothing to cure the actual state of dis-ease. It has long been known that a deficiency of the B-complex vitamins can cause seizures in any species, because it is essential for all metabolic functioning. EpiPlus powdered supplement contains high amounts of B-complex vitamins and calming herbs and should be fed on a daily basis. There are no known side effects unless your pet is allergic to one of the herbs in the product, then it can be tailor-made to fit your pet's needs at no extra charge. EpiPlus has had success in eliminating seizures completely or cutting them down dramatically in the majority of seizing pets who try it. The time factor for results depends on the individual pet.

5. ELIMINATE TOXINS in the house, yard and on your pet. NO cigarette smoke, flea collars, flea sprays, air fresheners, carpet powders, yard control, etc. See list mentioned earlier. If the environment cannot be controlled easily due to different family members, then you should look into a good air purification system like the ones at oxyfreshww.com, and if you order, please use distributor # 180606370 as the referral.

6. EXERCISE! Without exercise the body does not function properly. This is imperative for ALL pets. For dogs, daily walks are great in cool weather. On cool days, Vit D-3 from the sun has therapeutic effects. For inside cats and pooches, buying toys like a laser pen can be a great help. Training for obedience and tricks is also a good way to increase exercise and mental alertness. It also reduces stress because the pet knows what is expected of him.

7. KEEP A POSITIVE ATTITUDE. Don't say to your pet things like, "This is hopeless. I should put you out of your misery." DO say, "You will be fine, I am here and going to stay with you." Hold your pet in a comforting reassuring way. Calming herbs such as Holistic Animal Care's Calm & Relax can be helpful during these times, or when you know you are going into a stressful situation for your pet (vet visit, thunderstorm, etc.). You may find that learning canine massage will be helpful as well.

WHEN A SEIZURE OCCURS:

1. Remain CALM. YOU will prolong the seizure if you get upset and cry or yell.
2. Turn off all lights, TV and music and/or get to a quiet, darkened room.
3. Get the honey and give one teaspoon to one tablespoon, depending on your pet's size.
4. Sooth your pet and speak to him in a soft calming voice.

It's important to understand that this above program does not apply to every pet. At Alternative Pets, we like to FIRST do a through evaluation on each pet and THEN make recommendations. The private evaluations are well worth your time if you have a pet that has seizures.

