Seizures (Dogs)

In dogs, seizures are relatively common and may occur with no warning. It is important to be informed in the event your dog has a seizure.

There are different types of seizures:

**Generalized seizure/tonic-clonic seizure**
- Has two phases, “tonic” and “clonic,” and may come in a Mild or Grand Mal version.
- **Grand Mal seizure:**
  - the “tonic” phase during the Grand Mal seizure which usually lasts 10 to 30 seconds:
    - Dog falls to the ground, rigidly stretches out his legs and loses consciousness; breathing may also stop.
    - The “clonic” phase follows the “tonic” phase with some or all of the following symptoms:
      - Paddling of limbs or “running in place.”
      - Jaw movements (similar to chewing gum).
      - Pupils in both eyes dilate (become large); pupils are unresponsive.
      - Salivation or drooling.
      - Loss of control of bodily functions—urination and defecation.
- **Mild version of tonic-clonic seizure:**
  - There is little paddling of limbs
  - No loss of consciousness
  - urination and/or defecation may also not occur.

**Partial seizures**
- Seizure activities (leg paddling, muscle spasms, neck and head bending or the main part of the body and facial muscle spasms) only occur in one part of the body.
- Partial seizures are capable of getting worse until they seem to be a Grand Mal or Mild tonic-clonic seizure. The difference is in how the seizure began. Grand Mal or Mild tonic-clonic seizures usually affect the body from the start whereas the partial seizures may start at the face or one hip (i.e. starting in one part of the body).

**Complex partial seizures**
- Also known as psychomotor or behavioural seizures.
- Dog will perform strange repetitive behaviours such as running uncontrollably in small circles, howling, barking or yipping and biting at the air.
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- Some dogs may attempt to hide for no apparent reason.
- Other possible signs include: vomiting, diarrhea, drooling, biting at their sides or flank area and even blindness.
- Despite being awake during these seizures, the dog is unaware of what is happening around them or what they are doing.
- Complex partial seizures can last anywhere from a few minutes to several hours or can turn into generalized tonic-clonic seizures.

Status epilepticus seizures

- Can be life threatening.
- Can occur to dogs with a history of Grand Mal or Mild tonic-clonic seizures and a diagnosis of epilepsy.
- Status epilepticus seizures can also occur to dogs (that did not have any previous seizure activity) that:
  - Have had an injury to the brain.
  - Been exposed to toxins such as a huge amount of chocolate, poisons and pesticides.
  - Can be a result from disease.
- Status epilepticus seizures can appear as one continuous seizure that lasts more than thirty minutes or, in a repetitive loop of seizures without the dog regaining consciousness.

Cluster Seizures

- For cluster seizures, the dog has short time periods of returning to consciousness in between each seizure.

If your dog is having a seizure:

- Remain calm and focus on keeping your dog out of danger.
- Consider your dog’s safety:
  - If your dog is not on the ground, make sure he does not fall.
  - Move objects/furniture out of your dog’s way to prevent him from getting hurt. If you are unable to move the source of danger, make sure there are blankets and/or pillows between your dog and the object(s).
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- Consider your own safety as well:
  - NEVER place your hands or any objects in your dog’s mouth—you can get bitten. Your dog will not swallow his tongue. Similarly, do not place your face near your dog’s mouth.
  - Try to avoid being on the same side of your dog’s feet and toenails to prevent being injured from legs/nails during muscle spasms.

- Dim the lights and try to keep the environment quiet (turn off loud music or TV).

- Pay attention to the details and take notes in order to provide your vet with plenty of information.
  - What happened?
  - How long did the seizure last?
  - How severe was it?
  - How was your pet after the event?
  - How long to recover to normal after the event?
  - Did your pet urinate or defecate?

- Seek treatment once the seizure has passed by taking your dog to the vet.

- Seek treatment immediately if your dog has a seizure followed within seconds to minutes with another seizure repeatedly. These cluster seizures may not stop on their own leaving your pet with potentially irreversible brain damage from cranial swelling.

Determining why your dog had a seizure can be challenging. It is difficult to diagnose a seizure because it is not a disease. A seizure is a symptom with any number of causes.

When no other causes can be found, a seizure may be diagnosed as “idiopathic epilepsy.” Epilepsy may be genetic as it is more common in certain breeds such as German Shepherds, Irish Setters, Retrievers, Poodles and Dachshunds.

As no diagnostic test exists for epilepsy, the only way to determine whether your dog has epilepsy is by process of elimination (all the other possible causes for seizure need to be ruled out through a series of testing). Medical, environmental, metabolic or traumatic causes can be serious or life threatening. These causes need to be identified and treated. If diagnosed, many of these conditions can be treated successfully.