



## ANIMAL ANTICS

### Note for Pet Owners:

*Pet Patrol 365 provides this information for educational purposes only. You should seek the advice of your veterinarian if your pet is ill as only they can correctly advise on the diagnosis and the recommended treatment for your pet.*

## EPILEPSY IN DOGS & CATS

### INTRODUCTION

Epilepsy is often given different names, including the terms seizures, convulsions and fits. It is a relatively common problem, affecting all breeds of dogs and cats. Epilepsy can take several forms and the symptoms can vary considerably: from very minor, to major, life-threatening situations.

### CAUSES

Epileptic attacks are caused by abnormal electrical discharges occurring in the brain, a little like a short circuit. There are several distinct causes, although there is often not one, definite reason. Cases of this type are termed **idiopathic epilepsy**. Other cases can arise from specific problems, including: Kidney/liver/heart disease; Poisoning, such as with anti-freeze and lead; Diabetes; Metabolic disturbances, including eclampsia; Infections, such as distemper and tetanus; Trauma to the head and Brain tumours.

The sex of the animal, as well as the age and breed, can also influence the predisposition to epileptic attacks. Epilepsy can also be influenced by certain drugs and, in bitches, by the oestrus cycle.

Certain stimuli can also trigger epileptic attacks in patients with a history of epilepsy. These can include becoming over-excited, becoming over-sexed, getting too hot and being exposed to bright, flashing lights and to stressful situations.

### SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Epileptic attacks can be divided up into 4 distinct phases, although in some animals it is not very easy to distinguish between the different stages:

**Phase 1** - the **prodromal** phase - abnormal behaviour. Can last for several hours leading up to an attack.

**Phase 2** - the **aura** - a very short-lasting period of unusual behaviour just before the seizures.

**Phase 3** - the **ictus** or **fit** - symptoms can vary from minor trembling, twitching of the limbs/facial muscles, to collapse or complete loss of consciousness, with violent thrashing or spasms of the limbs and foaming at the mouth, together with urination and defaecation. Other signs can include dilation of the pupils, rigidity of the limbs, chewing movements of the jaws and salivation or drooling. This stage normally only lasts a few minutes but in some instances the fits do not stop. This condition is referred to as **status epilepticus** and constitutes a medical emergency.

**Phase 4** - the **postictus** - animals are dazed, disorientated, stagger about and show altered behaviour such as an inability to recognise familiar people during the 2-3 hours following a fit.

### TREATING EPILEPSY

There are several drugs that your vet may use to help control the symptoms. Depending on the frequency and severity of the attacks, your vet may choose not to use any medication at all, or to use a combination of several drugs to help the problem, if the fits are very bad.

### WHAT DO I DO IF MY PET HAS A FIT?

- Stay calm. Most fits are brief. Animals are usually totally unaware of the fit and so are not likely to suffer during the fit, even if they appear violent.
- Make sure you and your pet remain safe by moving any furniture out of the way so your pet cannot undergo trauma during the fit.
- Under no circumstances put anything in your pet's mouth, including your hands, during the fit as you may be accidentally bitten.
- Once your pet has come out of the fit, keep him in a quietened room to recover fully.
- Contact your veterinary surgeon immediately for advice.

*NB: Most fits only last 1-2 minutes. It is a good idea to time the fits so you are sure of the length. It is very helpful to carefully observe the fit. In particular, what were the first signs, was one side of the body affected first, and what sort of movements your pet exhibited, e.g. running movements, shaking, jaw chomping.*

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