



## Seizures

A seizure is uncontrolled activity in the brain that can cause a variety of signs. Although it is scary the first time you see one, most of the time your pet is not in any immediate danger from it.

### Causes

Several things including viral infections, parasites, poisons, a brain tumor, or liver disease can cause seizures. Epilepsy is a term for repeated episodes of seizures. Dogs can have idiopathic epilepsy, an inherited disorder that has no underlying cause for the seizures. That kind of epilepsy is rare in cats so a disease is usually causing the seizures.



### Signs

The most common signs include stiffening or falling over, paddling of legs, and trembling. The pet may pass urine or stool or salivate. If you come home to find a mess in your house, it's possible your pet had a seizure while you were gone.

Your pet can also have more mild signs such as staring off into space, chomping the mouth (like chewing bubble gum), or "fly biting", snapping in the air at what appears to be imaginary flies. Cats rarely have the mild forms.

Most seizures only last a minute or two. If it lasts much longer than this, it could become an emergency. Seizures that don't stop, called status epilepticus, are life threatening and your pet needs to see a veterinarian immediately.

Pets may also have clusters of seizures. They have another seizure shortly after finishing one. This can lead to status so this also requires emergency treatment.

After a seizure, your pet may be sleepy or seem confused. This will usually clear up within a day. Prior to a seizure starting your pet may appear anxious or has dilated pupils. We interpret this as the pet sensing a seizure is coming and is called an aura.

Dogs with idiopathic epilepsy usually start having seizures between the ages of 1 and 5 years. Pets that have seizures later in life usually have an underlying disease causing the seizures.

### Testing

Pets that have a seizure need to have tests done to look for a cause. Tests include blood and urine tests, x-rays, and may include advanced tests such as an MRI or CT scan.

### What to Do At Home

If you see your pet having a seizure, first take a calming breath for yourself! Then protect your pet. Keep him or her in a safe location during the seizure and away from stairs, tables, and other things that may cause injury. DO NOT reach into the mouth. Cats and dogs will not swallow their tongues and since they don't have control of their mouth, they may bite you unintentionally.



Start counting so you know how long the seizure lasts. Counting also helps you to stay calm. It's important to know how long a seizure is lasting and to see if it is worsening. If your pet has a seizure that lasts longer than 3 minutes, take him or her to a veterinarian immediately. It is also an emergency if your pet has three seizures within a 24-hour period or if another seizure occurs before the end of the previous seizure.

### **Treatment**

If testing finds a cause for the seizures, treating that cause is the first thing to do. Depending on what it is, you may need to treat the seizures as well.

You don't need to treat seizures that are mild and occur infrequently. Keep track of how often they occur and how long they last. Seizures often will become more frequent over time. If that is happening, your veterinarian may recommend treatment before they get worse. Early treatment generally controls seizures better.

Medication or a combination of medications will control seizures for most pets. There are also herbal formulas that can help. However, complete elimination of seizures may not always be possible. In that case, reducing the frequency or severity of seizures will still be beneficial.

Once your pet starts medication, it is life-long, and you will need to have blood tests monitored periodically. The medication controls the seizures but does not fix the brain.

