

5 Tips for Recognizing and Treating Canine Seizures

Timely, accurate recognition of seizures in canine patients allows practitioners to swiftly offer treatment and improve patient outcomes. Here are 5 tips for identifying and addressing seizures in dogs from Simon R. Platt, BVM&S, FRCVS, DACVIM (Neurology), DECVN. To learn more on this topic, tune in to the full discussion between Dr. Platt and Cassi Fleming, MS, DVM, in the VetFolio podcast, sponsored by PRN® Pharmacal, by scanning the QR code below.

1. Consider All Options

Seizure activity can appear similar to several other disorders. Unless there is a convincing description or video footage confirming a generalized tonic-clonic event, consideration should be given to the possibility of syncope, movement disorders, narcolepsy-cataplexy, REM sleep disorders, neuromuscular collapse, compulsive behavior disorders, and vestibular events.

2. Know the Signs

The 5 must-ask questions to determine whether the event in question is a seizure are: (1) Was there anything that could have triggered the event? (2) Was there rigidity noted in the limbs during the event? (3) Was there urination and or salivation during the event? (4) Was the pet responsive during the event? (5) Was there a period of confusion after the event?

3. The Usual Suspects

The causes of seizure activity include all the causes of brain disease. The most common cause in both dogs and cats is idiopathic epilepsy. More than 50% of pets will have this as a cause. The common characteristics of idiopathic epilepsy include: (1) It often starts between 1 to 6 years of age, (2) no neurological deficits are detected on examination, and (3) in the case of dogs, purebreds are most commonly affected.

4. Act Swiftly

The best time to initiate anti-convulsant medication for a patient with epilepsy is sooner rather than later. Precisely when to start anticonvulsant therapy is determined on a case by case basis, but criteria to consider include a pattern of more than 1 seizure every 3 months, an onset of cluster seizures or status epilepticus without metabolic or toxic causes, and the presence of a structural brain disease such as a stroke, inflammation, or neoplasia.

5. The Tool Box

There are multiple drugs available to treat seizures, including phenobarbital, potassium bromide (KBroVet®-CA1; PRN Pharmacal), levetiracetam, zonisamide, gabapentin, and pregabalin as well as topiramate. Phenobarbital is the most efficacious drug in both dogs and cats; however, it is accompanied by more adverse effects, including liver and bone marrow dysfunction, sedation, ataxia, polyphagia, and polydipsia-polyuria.



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