

# Yakima Pet Emergency Service: General Advice for Your Pet with Seizures

*Modified from guidelines by Dr. Anne Elizabeth Katherman, DVM, MS, DACVIM Neurology Specialty*

Seizures can be very frightening to witness when they occur in your beloved pet. For your pets' and your own safety, please observe the following guidelines:

## **General Information**

Many different types of seizures can occur, for many different reasons. The most common types of seizures are generalized, partial/focal, and behavioral. In general, seizures can occur secondary to metabolic illnesses, trauma, toxin ingestion, primary brain disease or some pets can have primary epilepsy.

Generalized seizures usually involve loss of consciousness, falling over, paddling or other tonic/clonic type muscular activity, jaw chomping, with salivation/frothing and loss of urine and/or bowels. Partial/focal seizures typically do not involve loss of consciousness and effect only one body part such as a limb or head twitch. Behavioral seizures also do not involve loss of consciousness and sometimes appear as if the patient is biting at unseen objects (fly biting) or starring into space.

In general, only generalized seizures *can become* life threatening if prolonged in duration or repeat frequently. Often, seizure activity will be followed by a "post-ictal" period. This is a normal period following generalized seizures in which patients may seem disoriented, confused, blind, lost, or drunk-like. Some pets can also seem like they don't recognize your or can be aggressive. This period typically lasts only 1-15 minutes.

## **Guidelines If Your Pet Has a Seizure**

Seizing animals do not swallow their tongues. Individual seizures are not life threatening unless prolonged over 5 minutes or occur repeatedly without recovering to normal in between. If your pet has a seizure, ***do not attempt to put your hands or face near their mouths or to restrain them.*** Your pet cannot control their movements and you may be severely bitten. You can move them away from dangerous obstacles such as a staircase if needed by pushing or pulling them ***from the back*** briefly. If on a hard surface a pillow or other padding can be placed under the head, again with caution to avoid the mouth.

One of the most important things you can do, is to time with your watch, the length of the seizure and record it in a seizure log such as the one provided to you at this visit. Recording the duration and frequency of seizures helps your veterinarian determine if preventative therapy is needed, what medication may work best for your pet, and whether preventative therapy is working as hoped.

## **When Do I Obtain Emergency Assistance**

If your pet continues to seizure longer than 5 minutes or has multiple seizures in 24 hours you should have them evaluated as soon as possible, preferably on emergency basis. If a single seizure lasts less than 5 minutes then you do not need to seek emergency intervention. Seizures which last longer than 20 minutes or occur in multiples (clusters) can result in brain and organ damage.

## **What Can I Do At Home**

Oral anticonvulsant medications are preventative and are not absorbed from the stomach rapidly enough to have any effect on an ongoing seizure. Therefore, giving additional doses of oral medication will *not help* to stop a seizure or prevent clustering seizure activity. Ongoing seizures can only be stopped with intravenous medication. If your pet has a historical pattern of clustering seizure activity, rectal preparations of short acting anticonvulsant can be prescribed for home use at the discretion and instruction of your veterinarian.

## **Anticonvulsant Medications & Assessing Response**

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It is important to remember that all oral, preventative anticonvulsant drugs require regular administration for a period of time, individual to that drug, before they achieve equilibration (known as “steady-state”) in the blood stream and will begin to affect the brains’ susceptibility to seizures. Your prescribing veterinarian will be able to tell you the typical equilibration time(s) for the drug(s) your pet is on.

Failure to control seizures prior to the drugs equilibration time *does not mean* that the drug is not working, or that the dose should be changed. Efficacy of a drug is determined by comparing the frequency and severity of seizures before initiating the drug to the frequency and severity of seizures after the drugs steady-state is achieved. Dose changes are determined as necessary after this time.

Drug levels must be measured periodically to determine whether the dose and frequency of administration are sufficient to achieve the desired level of the drug in the brain, and to ensure that toxicity problems are avoided. For most drugs, this is 2 weeks after starting the medication, then every 6 months.

The following procedures at intervals of 6-12 months are also recommended for all patients on anticonvulsant therapy: A physical exam, blood CBC and chemistry panel, & possibly liver function testing. These are done to detect any drug related or other metabolic problems before they adversely affect the patient. Your prescribing veterinarian will discuss recommended scheduling times for these tests.

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**Patient Seizure Log**

Patient Name: \_\_\_\_\_

#	Date	Time	Timed Length	Type: (generalized, partial, etc.)	Post- Ictal Duration	Notes: includes any changes, current drugs/dosages. Time of last dose, etc..
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