

# Seizures in Cats and Dogs

*A brief guide on disease progression including end-of-life symptoms*

## Common Signs of Pain

- Panting
- Lameness
- Difficulty sleeping
- Pacing
- Abnormal posture
- Body tensing
- Poor grooming habits
- Tucked tail
- Dilated pupils
- Licking sore spot
- Muscle atrophy
- Decreased appetite
- Vocalizing/yowling
- Reclusive behavior
- Aggressive behavior
- Avoiding stairs/jumping
- Depressed
- Unable to stand

*Before your pet's condition becomes unmanageable or they are losing quality of life, it is important to begin end-of-life care discussions. Learn about [pet hospice care](#) and/or [euthanasia services](#) in your area so you are prepared for what lies ahead.*

## What is it?

Seizures are the involuntary contractions of muscles due to abnormal electrical impulses in the brain. There are many causes, with epilepsy being one of the most common causes. Epilepsy is an abnormality of the brain's electrical activity that causes chronic, recurrent seizures. A diagnosis of epilepsy is made when no other causes are identified. Seizures can also be caused by hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), toxin ingestion, metabolic disorders, genetics, hormonal imbalances, brain infections, and liver disease, to name a few. Another common cause of seizures that we often see in older animals is brain tumors.

## How is it treated?

Treatment of seizures is dependent on the underlying cause. If the seizures are being caused by something such as low blood sugar, then the problem is easily detected and treated. More often than not, it is necessary for your veterinarian to run many diagnostic tests in order for the cause to be revealed. In cases of brain tumor or infection, an MRI and/or CSF tap (spinal tap) may have to be performed. Brain tumors that are causing seizures must be removed or their size decreased with radiation therapy. Antiinflammatory and antiseizure medications also help pets with brain tumors. Epilepsy can usually be controlled with lifelong oral medications, however, they are never really cured. Other causes such as metabolic and hormonal disorders can also be treated.

## What is the prognosis for seizures?

Most of the time seizures are treatable and the animal can continue living a normal, healthy life. There are situations, however, when a brain tumor or infection is incurable and the animal's chances of living a life of good quality are diminished. A personalized treatment plan is important to slow the progression of seizures. Talk to your veterinarian regarding the best treatment protocol for your pet.

## What symptoms can present as the disease progresses?

### Signs of progressive disease to be aware of include:

- Increased number of seizures (can be upwards of several per day)
- Increased intensity of seizures
- Increased length of time that seizures last
- Increased postictal phase (length of time it takes the animal to return to normal after a seizure)
- Reclusive behavior

*\*If your pet vocalizes due to pain or anxiety, please consult with your tending veterinarian immediately.*

### If seizures are due to a brain tumor, the pet may also experience:

- Depression
- Confusion
- Head tilt, loss of balance
- Cranial nerve deficits (decreased or loss of vision, difficulty swallowing, voice change)
- Pacing or circling
- Weakness
- Gain or loss of appetite
- Vomiting
- Weight loss, often severe
- Paralysis
- Coma

### CRISIS:

*Immediate veterinary assistance needed regardless of the disease*

- Difficulty breathing
- Prolonged seizures
- Uncontrollable vomiting/diarrhea
- Sudden collapse
- Profuse bleeding – internal or external
- Crying/whining from pain\*