

Epilepsy Fact Sheet

Managing Your Pet's Seizures At Home

This information sheet is designed to highlight some important considerations about handling your pet when it experiences seizure activity. We understand that your pet's seizures can be overwhelming, and our aim is to empower you with knowledge and resources to help you navigate your healthcare journey.

What Should I Do at Home if My Pet Has a Seizure?

Seeing your pet have a seizure can be frightening and stressful! Most seizures stop on their own within a short time, but some seizures can become emergencies. The most important things you can do are stay safe (do not put your hand in their mouth), time the seizure, protect your pet from injury such as falling down stairs or into a pool, and know when to seek emergency care.

What Does a Seizure Look Like?

A seizure may look like full-body stiffening, paddling, shaking, drooling, urinating, defecating, chomping, or loss of awareness. Some seizures are more subtle and may look like facial twitching, repeated jaw movements, staring into space, sudden abnormal behavior, or episodes where your pet seems "not there." Focal seizures can sometimes progress into full-body seizures, so continue watching closely until the episode fully stops. Not all weird episodes are seizures. Recording them can help your veterinarian determine if they were a seizure, movement disorder, or vestibular event.

What Should I Do First?

Start timing the seizure immediately. It often feels much longer than it really is, so using a phone timer can help. Piece of Mind offers a timer that video records and times the different phases (the active seizure and the recovery). Only take a video if it is safe for you and your pet to do so. Videos can help your veterinarian confirm whether the episode was truly a seizure or something that mimicked a seizure, such as fainting, collapse, pain, or vestibular disease.

Should I Hold My Pet or Try to Stop the Movements?

No. Do **NOT** restrain your pet, hold the tongue, open the mouth, or place your hands near the face. Pets do not swallow their tongues, and they are not aware of their actions during a seizure and may accidentally bite you. They do **NOT** know you are there and are not of normal mind! Even the sweetest pet may bite unintentionally during a seizure or while confused afterward, so even after a seizure use caution.

How Can I Keep My Pet Safe During the Seizure?

Move furniture, sharp objects, other pets, and children away if you can do so safely. If your pet is near stairs, water, or another hazard, gently block access rather than trying to pick them up. Move your pet only if there is an imminent danger. You can consider dimming the lights and reducing noise. Do not put anything in their mouth. Do not offer food, water, or oral medication while your pet is actively seizing, and use caution in the period after a seizure, called the “post-ictal” period/ recovery phase.

When is a Seizure an Emergency?

Seek emergency veterinary care right away if:

- The seizure lasts more than 5 minutes (any prolonged seizure >2 minutes warrants evaluation)
- Your pet has multiple seizures in 24 hours or repeated seizures close together.
- Your pet does not regain awareness between seizures.
- Your pet has trouble breathing, becomes very overheated, or does not recover normally.
- The seizure happened after possible toxin exposure, trauma, heatstroke, or medication overdose.
- If you HAVE ANY CONCERNS!
- A seizure lasting longer than about 5 minutes is often treated as status epilepticus, a life-threatening seizure emergency that requires rapid veterinary treatment. Prolonged seizures can cause dangerous increases in body temperature and other complications. We encourage people to start heading to the CLOSEST veterinarian after just 2 minutes of active seizure activity.

What Should I Do If the Seizure is Longer than 2 minutes?

If the seizure is still happening at 2 minutes, call your veterinarian or emergency hospital and prepare to transport your pet. Do not wait until the seizure has gone on for a long time before making a plan. If

your pet has been prescribed emergency seizure medication, give it exactly as directed by your veterinarian, but only if safe to do so!

Should I Cool My Pet Down?

If the seizure is prolonged, your pet may become overheated. Do not place your pet in an ice bath, and do not delay transport to continue cooling at home. If your pet is severely overheated, getting them emergency care is the most important aspect.

What Happens After the Seizure Stops?

Many pets enter a recovery period called the postictal phase. During this time, your pet may be confused, restless, temporarily blind, hungry, thirsty, clingy, anxious, or unusually vocal. This can last from minutes to hours. Keep your pet in a quiet, safe space and continue monitoring. Offer water only once your pet is awake, aware, and able to swallow normally.

Should I Give my Pet an Extra Dose of Seizure Medication?

Only give extra medication if your veterinarian has specifically instructed you to do so. Some pets have a written seizure action plan that includes rescue medication, pulse dosing, or instructions for what to do after a seizure. Do not give human medications, CBD products, extra phenobarbital, extra potassium bromide, or other drugs unless your veterinarian has told you exactly when and how to use them!

What if My Pet has been Prescribed ‘Rescue Medication’?

Use it exactly as prescribed. Some pets are sent home with emergency medications such as intranasal midazolam, rectal diazepam, or oral medications to use after recovery from a seizure. Oral medications should generally only be given once your pet is awake enough to swallow safely. Rescue medication can help, but it does not replace veterinary care if the seizure is prolonged, repeated, or recovery is abnormal.

What Information Should I Write Down?

Keep a seizure log (considering using Your Pet’s Piece of Mind!):

- Date and time of seizure
- How long it lasted
- What the seizure looked like
- Whether your pet lost awareness
- Signs during the seizure such as urination, defecation, drooling, paddling, vocalizing, or stiffness
- How long did the recovery took (post-ictal period)
- Possible triggers, missed medications, diet changes, stress, toxins, or illness
- Any rescue medication given, and the time it was given

When Should I Contact my Veterinarian if my Pet Seems Normal Afterward?

Contact your veterinarian after any first seizure, any change in seizure pattern, any increase in frequency, any seizure longer than usual, any cluster of seizures, or any abnormal recovery. Even if your pet seems normal afterward, the information may change the treatment plan. It is better to reach out than not if you have any concerns! They can direct you more specifically based on your individual pet!

This information sheet is intended for educational purposes only and does not replace professional veterinary medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always consult a qualified veterinarian regarding your pet's health.