

EPILEPSY

Epilepsy involves loss of consciousness but with characteristic continued motor activity. In human terms, these are "Grand mal" seizures. Seizure is an alternative term for an epileptic fit. Less severe epileptiform fits can occur, but these are very variable in their nature and severity and may be behavioural and not recognised as fits at all (human "Petit Mal" type seizures). Fits often happen from sleep, particularly the hereditary type. Epilepsy usually develops in the younger dog(less than 5 y.o.). There is increased susceptibility in some breeds (e.g. G.S.D.'s, Retrievers, Springers, Belgian Shepherds). It is rarer in cats. There are usually 3 phases but not all dogs show all phases:

- 1) Prodromal with Aura The dog acts peculiarly, may whine, become restless and pace. The Aura refers to the way these animals seem preoccupied. Not all epileptics go through this phase, and it is usually not prolonged.
- 2) Ictal The fit itself. Collapse with rhythmic cycling motor activity (tonic-clonic activity). Loss of bowel / bladder control, frothing, howling. The animal is unresponsive to owner or surroundings, but the owner may well report the pet as being conscious.
- 3) Recovery The motor activity subsides, and awareness of surroundings returns slowly. The dog may be restless and pacing or disoriented for hours.

ADVISE THE OWNER: Do not approach the dog or attempt to comfort or stroke it as this will only stimulate it further during the fit. It is VERY unlikely to swallow its tongue, and although it may appear conscious, it is not. Darken the environment if possible, and remove all sources of stimulation e.g. television, other sources of sound. Covering the dog with a blanket may stimulate it into another fit. Only approach when the dog can clearly recognise the owner again, and respond. There is no "off-the-shelf" home remedy which will help a fitting dog. If the fit continues for more than 10 minutes with no sign of abating, then the dog may be going into "status epilepticus" and is in genuine danger. This is an emergency, and requires attention, as the persistent muscle activity can cause fatal hyperthermia (overheating). The animal should be checked over when it has recovered, possibly the next day. Rushing it to the surgery as an emergency, unless it is in status epilepticus is very unwise. It is often best to ring the owner back after 5 or 10 minutes to check the animal's progress.

HEAT STROKE

Take a history (from the owner) and a rectal temperature (from the animal).

Cool with water or spirit (more effective but no smoking!) spray, and use a fan. Keep a litre of intravenous saline in the fridge in the summer. Frozen peas make good ice packs. Stop cooling at a rectal temp. of 101-102 degrees F. Breeds particularly prone are Collies (too energetic) and brachycephalics (too poor an airway to cool effectively).