

# Ask the Vet



## Ronald J. Komich, DVM

Dr. Komich graduated from the University of Georgia in 1967. After three years in the US Army Veterinary Corps, he entered private practice in Durham, NC. In 1971, he joined the staff at Greensboro Veterinary Hospital. He is a past president of the NCVMA. Dr. Komich enjoys his 6 grandchildren, his Golden Retriever Mac, his cat Sally and his horse Doc.

### What Constitutes a Seizure in Dogs?

Seizures in a dog can be a very frightening event for both the owner and their pet. A seizure is a neurological disorder that may be caused by multiple abnormalities, which must be sorted out. Diagnosing the cause of a seizure requires a thorough history, a physical examination and lab testing (blood & urine).

### What Causes Seizures in Dogs?

Frequent Causes of Seizures Include:

- Head trauma - recent, usually within the previous few days.
- Toxins – something ingested or applied, most often insecticide products, chemicals (petroleum distillates, fertilizers, anti-freeze), certain mushrooms, etc.
- Neoplasia – brain tumors (may require MRI or CT scan to detect).
- Metabolic – liver (not detoxifying effectively), kidneys (not removing waste products effectively), low blood glucose (diabetes), electrolyte imbalance, hemoconcentration (blood is too thick), or other internal abnormalities.
- Idiopathic Epilepsy – no apparent cause. Epilepsy is a diagnosis that is backed into by eliminating other causes for the seizures.

Seizures are Generally Measured by Three Variables:

- Intensity. Seizures can vary widely in intensity. A mild seizure (petit mal) may show facial twitching or dog may act “spaced out”. Sometimes they appear to be snapping at flies that don’t exist or exhibit some other bizarre behavior. Then just as

quickly as it occurred, it is over and they are back to normal. On the other end of the spectrum, with more extreme seizure activity (grand mal) they are on their sides, often paddling their legs, salivating, with involuntary urination and/or defecation and loss of consciousness.

- Duration. A seizure may last a few seconds to several minutes or longer. Grand mal seizures seem to last forever, but usually are one to three minutes in duration. It is helpful if you can actually time the seizure. After a seizure (the postictal phase) the pet is usually subdued and acts tired for several minutes to hours. A grand mal seizure is a strenuous event.
- Period between seizures. A seizure may be a one-time event, or they can come in a cluster, one seizure followed almost immediately by another. This cycle can go on for hours. Most often they start out once or twice a year and progressively become more frequent. Keeping a log of observed seizures is helpful, realizing that there may be some not observed.

### What Can be Done for Seizures?

Treatment Depends on the Underlying Cause Listed Above

Epilepsy requires prescription medication that is usually life long and requires periodic monitoring and adjustments. The most common epileptic drugs prescribed are phenobarbital and potassium bromide, given individually or in combination. Both drugs are metabolized by the liver, and excreted through the kidneys, which must be monitored closely for toxicity. Often, owners of epileptic dogs eventually identify activities that will precipitate a seizure, such as excessive excitement, packing suitcases, visitors, or certain foods. Obviously these activities should be avoided.

If your dog is seizing, try to get him/her on the floor where he cannot fall or hurt himself. Do NOT put your hand in his mouth; he will not swallow his tongue. Do not administer oral medication during a seizure. Stay calm; seizures generally have no lasting, discernible effects.

Once regulated, epileptic dogs usually lead a relatively normal, happy life.



# Greensboro Veterinary Hospital



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