

Information Sheet

Epilepsy

Epilepsy is a relatively common condition in the dog population. Many breeds suffer from it but it is commoner in some breeds - the Border Collie, German Shepherd and Keeshond.

Epilepsy shows itself in its fullest form as the dog having a full blown convulsion. This may include collapse and thrashing of the limbs and head, excessive salivation and sometimes passing urine and faeces. Some dogs especially in the milder forms or at the start of epilepsy may just behave oddly for a brief period – for example staring fixedly ahead of them at nothing in particular for a short while.

Epileptic attacks in people are preceded by an “aura” – this means that a convulsion is always preceded by the same odd sensation or for example strange smell. Some dogs seem to also experience this and some owners will see recognisable signs which always precede the “fit”.

After an epileptic attack many dogs will be confused or behave slightly oddly for up to one hour or two, and then become completely normal again. During a convulsion your dog is not fully conscious and so should be handled warily – as they can lash out without knowing what they are doing. If your dog is not in a position to come to any harm (for example if it might fall during the fit) it is best to leave them to recover on their own. It is NOT necessary to try and pull their tongue out!

Treatment

Treatment for epilepsy is by regularly giving tablets to your dog. These drugs sometimes have mild side effects at the beginning of treatment, for example slight wobbliness on the back legs and sometimes increased thirst but these are short lived and long term there are no side effects. The drugs for epilepsy are usually very effective in treating the condition long term. Nowadays with better understanding of the way these drugs work it may be advisable to have regular blood tests to monitor the level of the drug in your dog's system – so that the dosage can be adjusted better to suit your dog's needs.

The vets who treat your pet will always be happy to discuss treatment options and possible testing with you during any consultation.