

# Ask A Vet: Seizures are Alarming

*Sunday, December 21, 2014*

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

The other night, my dog was whining and acting funny. Then she fell on her side, lost control of her bladder, and had whole body tremors. It seemed like she did that forever, but when it was over she acted drunk and stumbled around for a few minutes, and then was fine. Was that a stroke or seizure, or what? She hasn't had one before or since.

-Worried Dog Owners

Dear Worried,

That sounds like a pretty scary event! What you have described is almost classic for a seizure. Seizures are caused by uncoordinated electrical activity within the forebrain, primarily the cerebrum (the outer layer of the brain). Seizures usually present with 3 phases. The first (pre-ictal) phase is when the dog will act agitated. They sometimes seek a safe place to be, or person to sit with. The second (ictal) phase is the actual seizure. While it can seem like it lasts forever, most seizures last from 30 to 90 seconds. Seizures can vary from laying or staring into space calmly to commonly thought grand-mal seizures. Despite what tales you might have heard, you do not need to reach into their mouth to hold their tongues, or even hold their bodies. They will not swallow their tongues, and since they do not know what is going on, your dog could severely bite you or another family member. It is best to give them space. If possible, it can be important to start a stopwatch to time the length of the seizure. The last (post-ictal) phase is when the brain re-organizes the electrical activity. During this time, your dog can glare/growl at you, stumble while walking, or lie down and pant heavily. This phase can last from minutes to hours afterwards.

When working up seizures, most veterinarians will start with a physical exam and blood work. This is to look for neurologic deficits that could indicate an infection within the brain, kidney disease, liver disease, or a potential mass within the brain. Frequently, you will be asked about possible exposure to various poisons for dogs, and what events led up to the seizure. Most of the time, the physical exam and blood work will show nothing abnormal. These cases will be classified as idiopathic epilepsy. This means that there is no definitive cause. If the seizures become frequent, we can give your dog an anti-seizure medication. Typically we start with a medication called Phenobarbital. This medication is truly designed to decrease the frequency of seizures, so if your dog has seizures frequently, then starting the medication may be warranted. This is best discussed on a case by case basis, so make sure to schedule an appointment with your regular veterinarian.

-Dr. Jason Heitzman