

Canine Epilepsy

August 20, 2007 7:32 AM

Your experiences with canine epilepsy?

So my dog has developed idiopathic canine epilepsy (3 seizures in 3 days). Blood work showed no physiological causes- it "just started", thus the "idiopathic" designation.

Anyone been through this? He's an adult beagle and my vet recommends starting a dosage of Phenobarbital. It's been very stressful and difficult to see him go through the seizures. I'd welcome any of your stories/recommendations.

posted by [I Love Bananas](#) to [pets & animals](#) (14 answers total)

Our adult miniature pinscher has seizures about once or twice a year - so far as we know. Not frequent enough for medication so I haven't really kept up on my readings on canine epilepsy. However, this website is a great resource: <http://www.canine-epilepsy.com/>

Just before an attack, he walks over to us a little cockeyed and I automatically know what's about to happen. I grab his pillow, lay it on the floor, he lies down on it and lets it rip. It takes a while for him to recover but we sit with him until he's ready to get up. I'm just glad that we're there for him when it happens (as far as we know).

Good luck with your furbaby.

posted by [Jujee](#) at [7:57 AM](#) on August 20, 2007

I had a poodle with epilepsy. I had to give him daily medication, but he still had seizures pretty often. As he got older, it got worse, until I had no choice but to put him down. Sorry I don't have a better story, but that was my experience.

posted by [The DeeJ](#) at [8:02 AM](#) on August 20, 2007

Aw. Poor little dude. My dog (now passed) was a Sheltie who had epilepsy. He was diagnosed when he was maybe two years old and lived to be 15. He died of old age.

He took phenobarb too. My family physician would prescribe it for us since getting it through the vet was expensive, whereas at human pharmacies it's the oldest drug in the book so it's crazy cheap. You have to have a pretty awesome doctor to do something like that. We'd give him his dose every day in a piece of cheese -- he was quite happy to take that (I don't even think he chewed, just inhaled).

His attacks were pretty scary -- he'd fall over, foam at the mouth, thrash around, pee all over the place. It was horrible to witness. We'd just try to clear his surroundings and stay nearby but not too near, until it was over. Usually afterward he'd just lay there tired for a while, or maybe wander around looking a bit confused and then go to sleep. We'd always make sure the stairways were blocked when he was in that state.

I know it seems super scary now but epilepsy isn't a crazy rare or new disease -- nor is phenobarbital a rare or new drug. It's really safe and well-known. Get him on the phenobarbital, be consistent, and he's gonna be just fine.

If you're looking for a heart-warming anecdote: he lived with my mother and stepfather in the country, on a river. In the winter the ice would freeze over, but one year they had a warm spell (now totally the norm) and it didn't completely freeze. My dog was crossing the ice to visit another dog when the ice broke and he fell through.

Someone crossing the little bridge over the river saw him and called the volunteer ambulance force. They came, commandeered a rowboat, and pulled him aboard. He wasn't breathing, so an attendant (*volunteer* attendant) gave him CPR. He was revived and with a few hours warming by the fireplace and getting lots of attention he was restored to perfect health. He lived healthily another 6 or 7 years after that.

Even though he had epilepsy he was able to survive that trauma -- your dude will be okay too. I promise.

posted by [loiseau](#) at [8:10 AM](#) on August 20, 2007 [[1 favorite](#)]

I've had 2 dogs with epilepsy, both mutts. When my first dog got it, my vet strongly believed it was psychological and suggested instead of medicine that I keep a detailed record of her activities for a few weeks. I did the same with the other one. With one dog, I found that extreme stress - like a stray dog much bigger than her in the yard - would "trigger" an episode a few hours later. Once I worked on minimizing stress for Nesta - such as building a fence - her attacks occurred maybe twice a year. However, one day she had a really terrible one and I had to put her down - she just couldn't get out of it.

I usually took my dogs everywhere with me, and with Widget I found her attacks often followed my leaving her for longer than a few hours. She would have an attack while I was away, and then, because her doggy brain thought she had been bad, would have often another one after I got home and found the mess, even though my attitude was of worry and concern rather than she made a mess. Her situation improved drastically when I got Nesta. (Widget eventually died of old age.)

I don't know if there was a correlation between their activities and seizures, but it worked for my dogs.

I think the most important thing is to make your dog understand it's not his fault and he's not

being bad. Like Jujee, I could always tell when they were about to have a seizure. Often just getting them outside, sitting by them and talking soothingly, and petting them the whole time, helped minimize the episodes. Occasionally I was even able to "talk" them out of it. The worst episodes for both dogs happened when I wasn't around.

Good luck, ILB. I know how hard it is, but your dog will be probably be ok.
posted by [barchan](#) at [8:39 AM](#) on August 20, 2007

I can also relate to how scary it is to see your beloved pet suffering from a seizure. My golden retriever started having them at about 3 years old, but he was lucky in that he didn't have them very often. He would have one or two a year. I didn't put him on phenobarb for this reason, and for the reason that over time it's toxic to the liver. When he was 10 years old, his seizures came on with a vengeance, increasing in frequency and severity. I started him on a strong phenobarb regimen at that time, but it only helped mitigate the seizures. His health began a rapid decline, and I decided to [put him down](#) before the epilepsy killed him. It was the most emotionally painful decision I've ever had to make. Epilepsy certainly isn't a death sentence, and I had many wonderful years with my dog. It just takes extra consideration for the long-term care and quality of life of your beagle. I wish you the best of luck.

posted by [malaprohibita](#) at [9:15 AM](#) on August 20, 2007

I had a dog with epilepsy. We suspect it was related to her being abused before we adopted her, but that was never confirmed. The phenobarbital helped reduce but did not eliminate her seizures. When she had a seizure, we would sit with her until she recovered. We never had a problem but the vet did warn that some dogs can bite out of fear when having a seizure so be careful until you know how your dog is responding.

posted by [maurice](#) at [9:42 AM](#) on August 20, 2007

A good friend of mine lost a dog she loved very dearly to canine epilepsy. She wrote [a bit about caring for Murphy](#), the dog in question. I hope maybe the stuff there will help you feel less alone, and maybe let you know what it can be like?

Please note: Murphy had the most aggressive case of epilepsy his vets had ever seen (though they'd seen close). My post, and a couple of the ones before mine should make clear that not every dog makes it. Every case is different. As such, I find the following *extremely* problematic:

your dude will be okay too. I promise.

It's those last two words. Unless you're a Magical Internet Veterinarian, I wouldn't *promise* the original poster a damn thing. Sadly, not every dog makes it, and neither you nor I are in any position to know, y'know?

I'm assuming by that you just wanted to pass along, a spirit-raising, stay-hopeful sentiment ... but, I wouldn't deliver it using that p-word.

Anyway.

My friend's advice would be to do what your vet says, and keep a close eye on your dog.

I hope things turn out okay for you and your beagle.
posted by [sparkleton](#) at [9:42 AM](#) on August 20, 2007

My beloved Hamlet who died in 1995 had seizures

After trial and error, they stopped when I took him off dried dog food and just fed him canned food. He was, I think, half lab and half coonhound.
posted by [andreap](#) at [1:22 PM](#) on August 20, 2007

Our recently departed pug had epilepsy which we successfully controlled for 10 years with a small doses of Phenobarbital.

Until we started dosing him he had 3-6 seizures a month, often when he had just woken up. After we starting dosing him, he had 3 seizures total, all caused by our slackness.
posted by [donpardo](#) at [1:38 PM](#) on August 20, 2007

My 3 year old hound was recently diagnosed with epilepsy. He has had 3 seizures we know of, and at least 1 suspected, based on the condition of the kitchen one evening. His seizures were grand mal. The last seizure was pretty bad, and he kept seizing, so we went to the emergency vet, where they told us that an extended seizure can cause overheating that could cause brain damage or even death. The phenobarbitol made him very wound up, and he lost most houstraining, so we stopped using it, and are seeing the vet shortly for new recommendations. It's not uncommon for dogs to have epilepsy and the severity varies. It's generally manageable. It's really scary when the poor dog is lurching around, trying to walk, being incontinent, etc. but there are treatment options. Good luck.

posted by [theora55](#) at [1:39 PM](#) on August 20, 2007

I have an adult beagle with epilepsy, and his seizures are very similar to your dog's -- extreme rigidity and high body temperature. I can usually tell one is coming because his temp starts to rise maybe 10 or 15 minutes before it hits (his head, especially, will be very warm to the touch), and he'll often act sort of manic and uncoordinated. (e.g., he'll suddenly start bouncing around the room and then try to jump up on a bed or sofa but not be able to coordinate well enough to

actually get up.)

They definitely seem to be stress-related, in my dog's case, and they tend to cluster -- he might have several over the space of a few days, and once he had a series of them one nearly right after the other in the space of an hour -- which was scary as all hell -- but then he won't have any again for months and months. (His last was over a year ago.)

Because of the long stretches in between bouts, our vet recommended waiting it out, and as long as they don't increase in frequency, he's not taking any medication for it. But if your vet is recommending the phenobarbital, I'd listen to him/her (which it sounds like you are planning to do).

Best of luck to you and your dog!

posted by [alyxstarr](#) at [3:05 PM](#) on August 20, 2007

Based on my experience with my border mix, there are a couple of things you might want to rule out before starting your dog on permanent medication:

a) Has your dog been exposed to any new substances lately? Most specifically, chemicals, cleaning products or the like? He could have doggy chemical sensitivity.

b) Has your dog been more exposed to stress than usual, or are the seizures usually precluded by things your dog doesn't like? My dog has gotten these kind of seizures in the last year or two, but only triggered by going to the vet. So in her case, since the trigger is somewhat avoidable but predictable, we're instructed to give her a dog-sized dose of Valium, prescribed by the vet, before bringing her in. It's not necessary to keep her medicated all the time.

If you've ruled these out, than support and advice from others will be more helpful than mine.

Good luck :)

posted by [RobotHeart](#) at [7:00 PM](#) on August 20, 2007

sigh This is a sad dog story and if you can't deal with sad dog stories, read no further. My family had a cute little puffball of a dog who came to us with epilepsy. A family member rescued him from the vets office where he had been scheduled to be put down at just under one year old, because his original owner had returned him to the breeder after he had his first seizure.

We kept him, of course and fed him a very small dose of phenobarbital every day, tucked into a little bit of turkey or ham. He was sweet natured and we had little problems with his health beyond the occasional seizure. When he was about three his seizures began getting worse, and in a stressful situation like our other dog barking for too long, he would have seizures. These seizures would start with him whining/howling, and then he would run around the room eventually flopping over and shaking. This was upsetting to some of my family members. We

would just swaddle him in a blanket and hold him as it happened. He would eventually stop (at this point after a few minutes) and go limp and semi-conscious for a while.

Throughout this he was still a happy, healthy dog outside of these spells. About another year later we suspected he was having seizures during the day when no one was home - for example he would be limping or acting 'out of it.' The pills also made him seem a bit fuzzy and prone to sleeping more.

At some point it seemed like his seizures picked up drastically - from once every two or three weeks (sometimes less) in his younger years, to somewhere around once or twice a week at age 3. The vet upped his dosage of phenobarbital after we reported this increase to him, and it seemed to make a difference although it also made him become a bit more sedentary.

Just before he turned five, he started having them almost daily, and so severe that he was frothing at the mouth and gasping for breath at the end of each. They were incredibly painful to watch and as these got worse and he would injure himself if we didn't catch him and wrap him up in a blanket immediately (by running into walls/furniture). He would also lose control of his bladder and bite down on his tongue in a way that had to hurt him. We sat down as a family and decided that it was time to put him to sleep. We spoke with the vet and he agreed that this had degenerated to a point that we could not control with medication.

Overall he was a happy part of our lives despite his health problems. Towards the end of things it was very frustrating and emotionally difficult to deal with. I would say that if you have young children the experience of the seizures (especially bad ones) can be very upsetting. He was a very sweet and happy little dog the rest of the time and was very much missed afterward, especially by our other dog. None of us regretted either the decision to rescue him as a puppy or to put him down four years later.

posted by [SassHat](#) at [9:56 PM](#) on August 21, 2007