

Golden Retriever Rescue of Wisconsin, Inc.

Seizures in Goldens**GRRoW Hotline: 888-655-4753**

Seizures in Goldens by Dr. Sue Fluhr

Why do seizures happen?

Seizures can be caused by a variety of conditions. The most common cause is canine epilepsy. Within our brains electrical activity occurs. Seizures occur when this electrical activity is abnormal or in excess. Humans, dogs and cats all have a “seizure threshold.” When stimuli exceeds this level, the abnormal electrical activity scrambles the normal brain activity and a seizure may occur. A normal seizure threshold prevents seizures from occurring due to every-day stimuli. The normal brain deals with the stimuli and interprets the message. In a seizure dog, this message becomes scrambled and can lead to a seizure. Drugs, low blood sugar and fever may lower the normal seizure threshold.

Canine Epilepsy is all too common in Goldens. My personal GRRoW dog, Tanner, was surrendered due to his seizures. He is a wonderful dog that would have been euthanized if not for the wonderful folks from GRRoW. Dogs with epilepsy can lead wonderful lives when their seizures are controlled with medication.

Watching a seizure can be distressing. The involuntary contraction of muscles and the associated events will make anyone’s adrenaline flow. The most severe seizure is the generalized tonic-clonic seizure. You may hear this referred to as a grand-mal seizure. All the muscles contract and there is a loss of consciousness. The dog falls over on its side and the head is stretched out and the legs are extended. There may be involuntary vocalization. Often the dog will urinate and defecate. This is then followed by jerking movements of the legs. After the movement has stopped, some dogs will lay quietly for a period while others pace and stagger; some dogs may experience blindness briefly after the seizure, bumping into things or falling over. This is referred to as the post-critical stage. This portion of the seizure may last for several hours. Partial seizures can also occur. This may be involuntary twitching of only a part of the body.

There are also seizures that only involve a part of the brain that controls a certain behavior. In this case, the dog acts in an unusual manner such as fly biting (snapping at imaginary flies). Reduction of seizures is the primary goal in the dog with epilepsy. Treatment of epilepsy may involve medications on a regular basis. The most common are Potassium Bromide and Phenobarbital and a combination of the two.

Phenobarbital is the most common. This medication is given twice a day and the level is monitored with blood tests. Monitoring of liver enzymes and bile acids is an important component of care. Potassium Bromide is the next common medication. This medication will come in a liquid or in specially made capsules. The level in the blood is also monitored. These drugs appear to work by raising the seizure threshold. When a dog has a first seizure it’s recommended that they have a thorough physical exam and a full chemical blood profile as well as a complete blood count. Owners are asked to keep a seizure diary that includes time, duration & frequency of the seizure, behavior before and after, urination and/or defecation. If seizures occur more than once a month or if more than one seizure occurs in a short time period medication will be started.

What to do when a dog seizes

Safety is the most important aspect. Remove other pets in the home to a blocked-off area. It is common for the other pets to attack a dog while it is seizing, including dogs that are the best of friends. Keep the seizing pet safe from stairways and sharp corners. Do not try to put anything in the dog’s mouth at the time of the seizure; dogs rarely bite their tongue during the seizure and there is a high risk of the dog

inadvertently biting your hand while it is in their mouth. Consider confining your dog to a safe area of the home while you work. A crate is ideal.

Cluster seizures

Cluster seizures are an emergency. This is a situation where the first seizure enhances the second seizure. If left uninterrupted they will continue and the dog may develop a high temperature that will exhaust the body's energy and lead to brain injury and death. The first seizure will scramble the electrical impulses making the second seizure more likely to occur. The cluster seizures are halted using a medication called valium. In dogs with known cluster seizures it is recommended to have oral and rectal valium available to be given at home. This method prevents frequent trips to the emergency room. If you would like more information, the link below will take you to an outstanding web site on canine epilepsy. www.canine-epilepsy-guardian-angels.com