

Pawsitive Press

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Using Acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine in the Treatment of Seizures in Pets

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Seizures are caused by a disturbance of the normal electrical activity in the brain resulting in tremors throughout the body. Seizures can range from mild to quite severe and can be a stressful event for pet parents. Causes for seizure activity in pets are many and can include trauma, brain tumors, and encephalitis. One of the more common presentations of seizures is called idiopathic epilepsy which means the cause for the electrical disturbance is unknown. Conventional therapies include drug therapy which may include "old guard" drugs like Phenobarbital and Potassium Bromide or newer generation drugs like Keppra. One treatment option, of which pet owners may not be aware and has been in use for thousands of years, is Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine (TCVM). This treatment has the ability to treat a number of ailments including arthritis, disk disease, allergies, gastrointestinal disorders and yes, seizures.

Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine includes the therapies acupuncture, herbal medicine, tui-na (a combination of massage, acupressure, and medical manipulation) and food therapy. A practitioner may employ one or a combination of these therapies to address seizure activity. TCVM can be used safely with conventional therapies. A pet owner may choose to use TCVM therapies alone or conventional therapies alone, but oftentimes, the best option is to use an integrative approach to achieve a *best of both worlds* outcome. As many pet owners are concerned with the side effects of conventional drugs, it should be noted that reduction in dosage of medication can often be achieved.

While conventional medicine seeks to suppress the signs of seizures with medication, TCVM seeks to restore balance to a body that is out of balance.

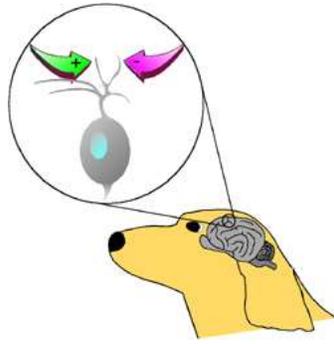
TCVM treatment is based on what is known as pattern diagnosis. While conventional medicine relies on the premise, one disease-one treatment, TCVM follows the idea of one disease-many treatments. For example, in TCVM, seizures can be caused by a number of patterns and if the practitioner can determine the correct pattern, they can determine proper acupuncture points and herbal formulas to use. While a main component of seizure activity is known as Internal Wind (think of wind blowing through the trees and how they shake), there are other major patterns associated with seizures known as Obstruction by Wind Phlegm, Stagnation of Blood, Liver Blood Deficiency, and Liver Kidney Yin Deficiency to name a few. A well-qualified practitioner can discern between these patterns based on a number of questions asked of the pet owner and a thorough examination. An example of a point used commonly to treat seizures is a wind dispersing point known as GB-20, another is Nao Shu, the brain association point.

The first step in treating your pet with TCVM is to schedule an

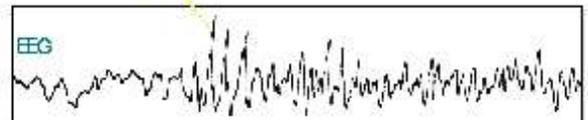
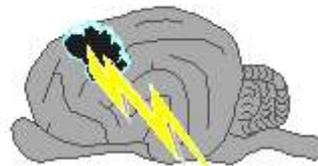
TCVM and Seizures Cont'd

with one of our TCVM practitioners, Dr. Todd and Dr. Bartholomew. The doctor will determine if your pet is a candidate for treatment and then you will schedule a first acupuncture appointment. This appointment will last roughly 1 hour, during which time a TCVM pattern will be determined and your pet will receive the first acupuncture treatment. You will then be sent home with appropriate herbal formulas. Weekly treatment will be performed for 4-6 weeks with future appointments set at regular intervals as the pet's condition dictates.

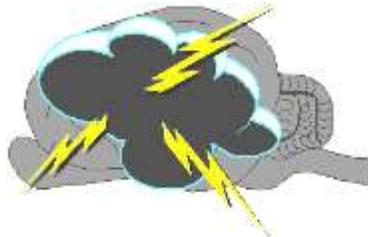
As with any therapy, our goal for the patient is always quality of life and in these patients, a reduction in seizure activity. This may be achieved either through TCVM therapies alone or an integrative approach. Remember, our aim at the Animal Hospital of Dunedin is a happy and healthy pet!



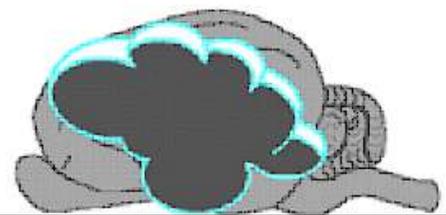
The balance of inputs to a nerve cell determines how excitable it will be.



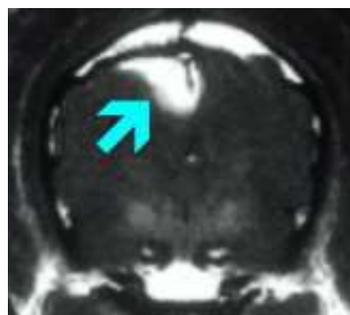
An imbalance can cause an electrical storm in the brain which we see on the EEG. A focal seizure begins in localized brain area which we can detect with the EEG.



Generalized seizures begin over the entire brain simultaneously.



Petit mal or absence seizures cloud consciousness without convulsions.



This MRI scan of the brain shows a tumor in a dog having simple focal seizures

Seizures in Pets: Symptoms, Types, & What to Do

Your usually happy-go-lucky pet seems unsteady and confused. Then he flops to the floor. Even though he's unconscious, he looks like he's treading water. He may be having a seizure. Why is this happening, and what can you do?

If your pet has them often, he may have a seizure disorder. Another name for that is epilepsy. Abnormal, uncontrolled bursts of electrical activity in your pet's brain cause seizures, affecting how he looks and how he behaves. Seizures can look like a twitch or uncontrollable shaking and can last from less than a minute to several minutes.

What Are the Symptoms of Seizures?

Symptoms can include collapsing, jerking, stiffening, muscle twitching, loss of consciousness, drooling, chomping, and tongue chewing, or foaming at the mouth. Pets can fall to the side and make paddling motions with their legs. They sometimes defecate or urinate during the seizure.

Some pets may look dazed, seem unsteady or confused, or stare off into space before a seizure. Afterward, your pet may be disoriented, wobbly, or temporarily blind. He may walk in circles and bump into things. He might have a lot of drool on his chin and could be bleeding in his mouth if he bit himself. He may try to hide.

What Are the Types of Seizures?

The most common kind is the generalized seizure, also called a grand mal seizure. A pet can lose consciousness and convulse. The abnormal electrical activity happens throughout the brain. Generalized seizures usually last from a few seconds to a few minutes.

With a focal seizure, abnormal electrical activity happens in only part of the brain. Focal seizures can cause unusual movements in one limb or one side of the body.

Sometimes they last only a couple of seconds. They may start as focal and then become generalized.

A psychomotor seizure involves strange behavior that only lasts a couple of minutes. Your dog may suddenly start attacking an imaginary object or chasing his tail. It can be tricky to tell psychomotor seizures from odd behavior, but a dog that has them will always do the same thing every time he has a seizure.

What Should I Do if My Dog Has a Seizure?

- First, try to stay calm. If your pet is near something that could hurt him, like a piece of furniture or the stairs, gently slide him away.
- Stay away from your pet's mouth and head; he could bite you. Don't put anything in his mouth. Dogs and cats cannot choke on their tongues. If you can, time it.
- If the seizure lasts for more than a couple of minutes, your pet is at risk of overheating. Turn a fan on your pet and put cold water on his paws to cool him down.
- Talk to your pet softly and gently touch him to assure him. Call your vet as soon as you can.

If your pet has a seizure that lasts more than 5 minutes or if he has several in a row while he's unconscious, take him to a vet as soon as possible. The longer a seizure goes on, the higher a pet's body temperature can rise, and he may have problems breathing. This can raise his risk of brain damage. Your vet may give your pet IV medication to stop the seizure.

What Should I Expect When I Take My Pet to the Vet?

- Your vet will want to do a thorough physical exam and get some lab work to look for the causes of your dog's seizures.
- Your vet may prescribe medicines to control seizures, like phenobarbital or potassium bromide. You can give your dog phenobarbital twice a day, but over time it can damage his liver. Dogs that take phenobarbital need blood tests about every 6 months.
- Potassium bromide doesn't work its way through the liver, making it a better choice for young dogs that need medicine for life.
- Always follow your vet's instructions when you give your dog medicine. Don't let him miss a dose.

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