

## One of the Scariest Events You Could Witness in Your Pet

You may notice your pet acting scared or dazed, and she may seek your comfort or hide. That's your signal that it's coming and it may be one of the most terrifying things you'll have to watch. What to do if this happens in your cat or even a small dog.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- The severity of feline seizures can range from as mild as a subtle eye twitch, to a very serious grand mal event. Cats tend to have focal motor seizures that affect just one area of the body
- Causes of feline seizures include brain disorders, systemic disease, toxin exposure and a newly discovered type of seizure that seems to be triggered by certain normal sounds in the environment
- Most seizures in kitties last from 30 to 90 seconds. Emergency veterinary care is only required if the cat is having a grand mal event he isn't coming out of or a cluster of seizures one right after another
- A conservative approach to treating non-life-threatening seizures in cats is to begin with holistic therapies, incorporating drugs into the protocol only if and when it becomes necessary
- A carbohydrate-free diet containing a high amount of protein and moderate amounts of fat is also recommended

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Of all the disorders that can befall feline family members, a seizure is probably one of the most frightening to witness. Seizures in kitties are often preceded by an aura during which the cat may seem dazed or scared, or he may hide or seek comfort from his human.

Once a major seizure begins, kitty will fall on his side. His body may grow stiff or he may make a paddling motion with his legs. Many cats also grind their jaws, drool excessively, vocalize and lose bladder or bowel control.

These episodes last between 30 and 90 seconds. After a seizure, kitties can appear confused or disoriented. They may wander aimlessly or pace, act restless, experience difficulty seeing and have increased thirst or hunger.

Recovery after an episode is sometimes immediate, or it can take up to 24 hours for the cat to feel and behave normally again. Most cats have a first seizure between the ages of 1 and 4 years.

### Types of Seizures

A petit mal seizure is the mildest type and can be as minor as an eye movement. A grand mal seizure is the other extreme, and as described above, the cat loses consciousness, usually falls down, paddles with her legs, jerks, twitches, vocalizes and may urinate or defecate.

Status epilepticus is a grand mal seizure that doesn't resolve. This is a medical emergency in which breathing ceases and the animal can die.

If your cat is experiencing a grand mal seizure and isn't coming out of it (if it lasts more than 90 seconds), it's critical you get her to an emergency veterinary hospital right away in order to save her life.

Cats (and small dogs) more typically have something called a focal motor seizure where only part of the body seizes. It can look like a twitch, tremor or cramp. It's important you address this with your veterinarian, but you don't need an urgent care appointment.

Cluster seizures are events that occur several times a day. Many cluster seizures are urgent care situations. If your kitty has had more than one seizure in a day, you should definitely make an appointment immediately with your veterinarian.

This type of seizure can lead to continuous seizing and/or progressively more intense seizures.

## Causes of Feline Seizures

- **Brain disorders** — Head trauma that results in brain swelling can cause seizures, as can a hemorrhage in the brain, autoimmune inflammatory conditions in the central nervous system or a blood clot (a stroke).

Brain tumors are a common source of seizures in older cats. It's very unusual for a senior cat to suddenly develop epilepsy. If your kitty is older and starts seizing, unfortunately, the likely cause is a brain tumor.

Bacterial, viral, fungal and parasitic infections that affect the brain can also cause seizures, along with diseases such as feline infectious peritonitis (FIP) that cause lesions in the brain.

- **Systemic disease** — Certain disorders that start elsewhere in your cat's body can affect brain function and trigger seizures. One of these is hypertension (high blood pressure), which in kitties is usually the result of kidney disease.

Liver disease, including liver shunts, can indirectly cause seizures. The liver's job is to process toxins, and if it can't do its job effectively, poisons can build up in your kitty's bloodstream and cross the blood-brain barrier.

Your cat can develop a condition called hepatic encephalopathy that can lead to toxin-based seizure activity.

- **Exposure to toxins** — Lead, mercury or plant poisoning can induce seizures in your kitty. Fertilizers, pesticides, insecticides and herbicides are also known to cause seizures, as is antifreeze (ethylene glycol).

Applying a flea/tick medication to your cat — especially one that is intended only for use on dogs — can also trigger seizures.

Human drugs like NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), antihistamines, antidepressants and diabetic medications can all cause seizures in cats, as can veterinary drugs.

- **Exposure to certain sounds** — Veterinary researchers in the U.K. published the results of a study on a newly discovered phenomenon — sound-related seizure activity in cats.

They named the disorder feline audiogenic reflex seizures (FARS). The noises most likely to cause a seizure in the study cats included:

- Crinkling of aluminum foil
- Typing on keyboard; clicking of mouse
- Metal spoon against ceramic bowl
- Clinking of coins, keys
- Clinking or tapping of glass
- Hammering of nail
- Crinkling of paper or plastic bag
- Clicking of owner's tongue

The 96 cats in the study were between 10 and 19 years old, and researchers believe that because older animals tend to have other health issues, a seizure disorder may be overlooked.

The researchers confirmed that avoiding making the sounds reduced the cats' seizures, and the louder the sound, the more severe the seizure.

## **What to Do if Your Cat Has a Seizure**

If your kitty has a seizure, try not to panic. Be sure to give your kitty some safe space during a seizure and take great care handling her because you could be scratched or bitten.

Use a blanket or pillow to prevent her from falling off a couch or bed, or down the stairs during a seizure. If you need to quickly get her to your veterinarian or an emergency animal clinic, gather her up in a thick towel to keep both of you safe during the drive.

Speak with your veterinarian about it as soon as possible, unless of course the seizure is a grand mal and your pet isn't coming out of it, in which case you need to seek emergency veterinary care immediately.

If your vet rules out all potential causes of your cat's seizure, you'll be given a diagnosis of idiopathic epilepsy, which means seizure of unknown origin. Most veterinarians treat such cases with anti-seizure medications, which carry serious potential side effects.

The guideline I follow is that a cat must be experiencing more than one grand mal seizure a month before I even consider drug therapy. There are many natural substances that can help increase your cat's seizure threshold and decrease the potential for these events. I've used acupuncture, herbal, homeopathic, chiropractic and nutraceutical therapies to extend seizure thresholds.

Often I'm able to use these modalities as the sole treatment for mild cases. For kitties with frequent grand mal seizures, I typically create an integrative protocol of natural therapies and drug therapy.

## What to Feed a Cat With a Seizure Disorder

In human medicine, many patients with seizure disorders often improve after starting a ketogenic diet containing no carbohydrates, moderate to high amounts of fat and moderate levels of protein. Since this is the foundation of species-appropriate nutrition for carnivores, it certainly makes sense for cats as well.

It's important to transition your cat to any diet slowly, but it's especially important to go slow when moving to a ketogenic diet, making sure you (or your vet) calculate the number of calories your cat needs a day from her new food. A high-fat diet means your cat will eat a much smaller volume of food.

I start by moving cats to a new diet by using it as snack multiple times a day for several days. Then I replace half of one meal with new food, mixing it with 50 percent old food. After several days I replace one entire meal with new food. After several more days (or weeks, whatever it takes until they're eating the new food), I slowly taper the remaining meal until they're eating only the new diet. During this time, adding digestive enzymes and **probiotics** can be very beneficial.

It's important to understand that feeding "grain-free" dry or canned food won't cut it if you're attempting to reduce seizures using ketogenic dietary strategies. You'll need to customize a complete and balanced diet by working with a holistic nutritionist capable of walking you through the different macronutrient protocols used for nutritional control of epilepsy.

## Assessing Seizure Triggers

It's also very important that you track the dates, times and intensity of your cat's seizures. Believe it or not, I often see correlations between seizures and a particular time of month, year or even phase of the moon! Some vets think cats seize more in the morning when, they're resting.

If you're able to identify a seizure cycle in your pet, your veterinarian can help devise a plan to control these events, which should always start with use of the most safe, natural treatment options available. If you don't have a holistic vet to work with I recommend you find one **[here](#)**.

If your cat has a seizure that seems to be triggered by a particular sound, it's important to speak with your veterinarian about it as soon as possible. If he or she is aware of FARS and recommends drug therapy, I suggest you proceed with caution and consult with a holistic veterinarian if possible.

Obviously, the first thing you'll want to do is try to eliminate the triggering sound from your cat's environment. In addition to supplements that can help to extend seizure threshold, I would also consider using homeopathy or traditional Chinese medicinals before resorting to conventional treatment.

I'm suspicious that vaccinosis may also be a root cause of FARS and other types of feline seizures as well, so I don't recommend additional vaccines of any kind for cats suffering from seizures. In fact, detoxifying these patients from previous vaccines may be very beneficial.

## Sources and References

[VetStreet August 16, 2016](#)