

WOULD YOU KNOW IF YOUR DOG HAD A STROKE?

Strokes in dogs are less common than they are in people, but when one strikes the condition is equally as serious as a human stroke. There are three major forms of canine strokes, and it is important for pet owners to be aware of their causes and warning signs so they will know what to do if their dog has a stroke.



The two most common forms of canine strokes occur when an artery in the brain becomes blocked and cuts off oxygen to the area or when blood vessels in the brain rupture and hemorrhage. Both of these are serious conditions that need immediate treatment. These strokes are called cerebrovascular accidents (CVA) or transient ischemic attacks (TIA).

The third type of stroke seen in dogs is called a fibrocartilaginous embolism (FCE). It happens after a small piece of disc material inside the back breaks off and drifts into the spinal cord. This type of stroke happens very quickly when a dog is playing, jumping, or running.

Signs

Dog owners may see a variety of signs immediately following a stroke, but some are subtle and hard to notice if you don't know what to look for. To make matters worse, there are typically no signs warning that a stroke is going to happen. After a stroke occurs, problems can worsen in a short period of time if the stroke is left untreated.

Here are some common signs of a canine stroke:

- Walking in circles or turning the wrong way when called
- Head tilted to one side
- Difficulty with balance and standing
- Extreme lethargy
- Loss of control over bladder and bowels or vomiting

Worsening symptoms can include loss of eyesight, heart arrhythmia, and the dog could also collapse.

What you should do

If you suspect your dog has had a stroke, look inside her mouth for dark red gums or check her inner eyelids to see if they are dark red. This may indicate a decrease in oxygen to the body. If

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there is any suspicion of a stroke, it is important that you take your dog to a veterinarian immediately.

Causes

Strokes can be fatal in dogs, but the good news is that, when the cause is found and prompt treatment is given, dogs have a greater chance for a full recovery than humans, even if the stroke is severe.

Elderly dogs are more prone to strokes, but the condition is seen most often in dogs with these health problems:

- Head injury
- Heart disease
- Diabetes
- Kidney disease
- Thyroid disease
- Cushing's disease
- Brain tumors
- Poison and some parasites
- Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever

Making the diagnosis

The best tools to determine if your dog has had a stroke are a CT scan or MRI. About 50 percent of all canine strokes do not have a specific cause.

While canine strokes can be extremely serious, the majority of dogs have a good outcome, especially when they receive quick veterinary intervention. The best practice for dog owners is to know the warning signs, be aware of the factors that make some dogs more prone to stroke, and act fast if they suspect their dog is having, or has had, a stroke.