

Idiopathic Epilepsy

What is idiopathic epilepsy?

Epilepsy is a complex brain condition that causes repeated seizures and is common in dogs and cats. Numerous different underlying causes or diseases can cause seizures leading to epilepsy. In younger to middle age dogs an underlying cause often cannot be identified. In those cases the diagnosis of Idiopathic Epilepsy is made. The term “idiopathic” describes a disorder arising “by itself”. Idiopathic epilepsy often runs in families and pedigree studies have demonstrated a hereditary basis for idiopathic epilepsy in several breeds.

How do we diagnose idiopathic epilepsy?

Idiopathic epilepsy is a diagnosis of exclusion, meaning that we rule out other possible causes of repeated seizures and in cases where these tests are normal we conclude a patient is diagnosed with idiopathic epilepsy.

Typical steps for investigation include blood tests to evaluate organ function, MRI scan of the brain under general anaesthesia and sometimes CSF analysis.

What is the treatment for idiopathic epilepsy?

We attempt to control seizures and reduce their severity with medication; however, it is important to understand that the underlying disease (idiopathic epilepsy) cannot be ‘cured’ with medications and therefore further seizures will continue to occur in most patients. As many as 30% of patients will have no significant response to anti-seizure medication. Only ~10-20% of animals become seizure free during their lifetime. Adjustment to the medication is often needed at the start of the treatment and throughout the pet’s life depending on treatment response. We sometimes have to use multiple drugs to achieve the best seizure control. Treatment will be for the life of your pet.

Our goals are for your pet to have a good quality of life and to have as few seizures and side effects from the medication as possible. You will need patience because it can take months to find a suitable dose/combination of medication for each individual. Epilepsy is a lifelong condition that can be challenging to treat.

Other considerations in pets with idiopathic epilepsy:

Seizure Diary

Please keep a diary of all of all seizures and their severity. We will need to review this during rechecks. Copies of the seizure diary can be sent via email (info@cave-vet-specialists.co.uk) as needed.

Diet

Medium chain triglycerides (MCT) has now been shown to play an important role in the holistic management of dogs with epilepsy. Purina Pro Plan NeuroCare is a licensed diet (with MCT oil) which has been shown in clinical trials to reduce the number of seizures and number of seizure days. It has also been reported to help with neurobehavioral signs associated with epilepsy. In some patients it is not appropriate to change their diet and therefore we can add a MCT oil supplement to the diet.

CBD Oil

There is limited evidence that CBD oil is beneficial in management of idiopathic epilepsy, however there is ongoing research in this area. It is important to note that CBD oil can cause side effects including sedation, ataxia and increases in the liver enzymes.

Neurobehavioural Signs

We are becoming increasingly aware that veterinary patients with epilepsy often have concurrent behavioural disorders for example anxiety, aggression and loss of training. In some patients the anti-epileptic medication can help reduce the anxiety related behaviours. In addition it is possible that the Purina Pro Plan NeuroCare diet may help. Should you have ongoing concerns please contact us to discuss further.