



The Peppertree POST

FALL 2006 ISSUE

What do we do? Rescue Dogs of good temperament who need new homes • Cooperate with and assist other rescues, shelters, and animal control • Educate the public about how to obtain a companion animal.

What You Should Know About Canine Epilepsy

Over the past few years Peppertree has taken in a few dogs with epilepsy. The dogs were turned in because of the owner's fear and reluctance to continue living with a dog with this serious condition. Two of these dogs, Tara, and Jack became long term hospice fosters with the program because of the difficulty associated with placing a dog with a chronic medical condition. This article is meant to inform the dog owning public about the nature of canine epilepsy, knowledge is always a first step toward alleviating the fear that leads people to part with a dog with special needs. Please keep in mind as with anything you read relating to your dog's health it is absolutely not a substitute for quality, consistent veterinary care, this article is only meant to be educational. Always discuss any health or medication issues for your pet with your veterinarian first before making any changes. Information used to write this article was found on www.canine-epilepsy.net a site maintained by Dennis O'Brien, DVM, Ph.D.

The term epilepsy means repeated seizures. Some animals may experience a seizure as an isolated event, however, continued seizures over a period of time is epilepsy. Seizures are the sign of a brain disease. Sometimes that brain disease can be identified such as a tumor or a stroke, and the seizures are symptomatic or secondary epilepsy, other times a cause cannot be found and that is referred to as idiopathic or primary

epilepsy.

A seizure is an electrical storm in the brain. Normal brain cells use electrical and chemical signals to communicate with each other. The communication is excitatory, activating subsequent neurons or inhibitory, shutting off the next neuron. The delicate balance influences the entire brain and how information gets passed from one neuron to the next. If the balance



Jack was one of Peppertree's epileptic dogs

becomes too excitatory a seizure can result. Please remember that excitatory neurons, does not mean your dog is acting excited. Actually, most seizures happen with the dog is relaxed or asleep, but rarely can be associated with exercise or emotional

stimulation.

Epilepsy can be difficult to diagnose, and is often a diagnosis of elimination. Seizures are impossible to predict, and usually do not have a pattern or particular cause. For some dogs changes in weather or stress might bring on seizures but for the majority of dogs seizures are extremely unpredictable. The onset of having seizures for most dogs is between the ages of one

and three. Some studies estimate that about four percent of all dogs are affected by epilepsy. If you think that your dog may be having a seizure it is important to write down all of the behaviors you witness to help your veterinarian better diagnose your dog's illness. Some problems such as fainting or dizziness may appear to be a seizure but are not, so details are important in making that determination. An electroencephalogram (EEG) is a useful tool in diagnosing epilepsy but it has some obvious drawbacks. The largest drawback is that if the dog is not having a seizure while it is connected to the EEG then the brain abnormalities cannot be seen.

It is also difficult to have the animal be awake while connected to the EEG and the anesthesia can affect the EEG reading.

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Seizures can be put into two broad categories, generalized, meaning the storm is everywhere all at once, or focal, the abnormal electrical activity is in a small area of the brain. Generalized seizures are either major motor (grand mal) or absence seizures (petit mal). The grand mal seizure is the classic seizure and sometimes called a tonic-clonic seizure. This most common type of seizure usually has three phases the aura or prodrome, the seizure itself, and the post-ictal behavior. The aura is a recognizable change in the dog's behavior, the pet acts nervous or anxious, they may seek attention from their owner or may withdraw and hide. This stage can also happen with focal seizures. The tonic-clonic phase begins with a stiffening of the dog's muscles and usually the pet falls over at this point with the legs stretched and the head back. Once this part begins the dog is no longer conscious, even though the eyes may remain open, the face may twitch and/or there are vocalizations. These involuntary movements or sounds are not an indication of pain. The dog may

also drool excessively, urinate, defecate, or empty his anal glands causing a foul smell. This tonic part is usually very brief, less than 30 seconds, and is followed by the clonic phase, which consists of rhythmic movements such as chomping of the jaw, and jerking or running movements of the limbs. The dog does not breath well during the seizure and the tongue may turn blue. Most seizures are brief and isolated, however, some large breed dogs can have a condition called status epilepticus where the dog has a seizure, recovers from it, a few hours later has another, and then another, never completely recovering from the subsequent seizures. This condition can also be that the dog starts seizing and does not stop, in either case this is an emergency situation in need of immediate veterinary care.

Absence or petit mal seizures are the other type of generalized seizure. It is named absence because the dog has little movement during this type of seizure often just staring blankly into space. This is probably a seizure caused by a storm of inhibition in the brain rather than excitation. The medication to treat this pattern of seizures is very different than the other seizures described above, but this condition is rare in dogs.

Focal seizures are localized in one area of the brain and are often an indicator of some type of local damage such as a brain tumor or an infection. Focal seizures are also broken down into two categories simple, and complex. A simple seizure originates in the area of the brain responsible for movement, the face is commonly affected and the dog twitches or blinks and this is often limited to one side of the face. The dog is usually awake and alert during these, but the seizure can spread and become generalize and then the dog will become unconscious and the seizure will become grand mal.

A complex seizure originates in the area of the brain responsible for emotion and behavior; they are sometimes called psychomotor seizures. During this type of seizure the dog's consciousness is altered they behave very strangely. Some examples of odd behavior associated with this type of seizure are running uncontrollably, senseless repetitive behavior, and sometimes even



rage. Bodily functions can also be affected causing the dog diarrhea or vomiting. These types of seizures are also very brief.

What does all of this mean in terms of living with a dog that has epilepsy? Of course with this type of medical condition there are some added responsibilities, however, the modifications are not vast, or terribly disruptive. These dogs can still enjoy a high quality of life that contains all of the regular activities dogs love. Controlling the seizures by decreasing them in number and severity is

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the goal of antiepileptic drug therapy. Common drugs used to treat epilepsy are Phenobarbital, potassium bromide, and diazepam. These drugs are usually used separately but sometimes will be used in combination; chemically they all act to inhibit electrical activity in the brain. Therefore, one of the main side effects of the drug therapy is sedation; however, most dogs develop a tolerance to this side effect within a week of beginning therapy or increasing a dosage regain their normal activity level. Another side effect is appetite stimulation; this in combination with the decreased energy level can lead to weight gain, and therefore should be monitored. Epileptic dogs are still capable of daily exercise, and due to these side effects should exercise to keep their weight at a normal level. The drugs can also affect coordination causing the dog to weave while walking as if intoxicated. Finding the appropriate level of medication for the dog can take some trial and error in order to find the perfect balance. Changes in medication dosage should always be discussed with your veterinarian first, as abrupt changes in medication can cause seizures as well. The success rate of controlling seizures in dogs is about 66 percent. So some dogs will not have results with medication and the seizure control will be difficult. For all epileptic dogs the longer they live with the condition, and the more seizures they have the more likely they are to suffer the long term side effects to the brain and other major organs. This can lead to behavioral setbacks like the dog forgetting certain things they have already learned like housebreaking, or physical problems like heart or liver ailments related to the added stress on the body.

Remember to live, love, and enjoy your dog. The commitment to owning a dog is one that should last for the duration of its life, in sickness or in health. It may not always be easy but it is definitely rewarding, you will be able to tell how much they appreciate the good care in the unconditional love they give back to you everyday.

by Lucia Perfetti Clark

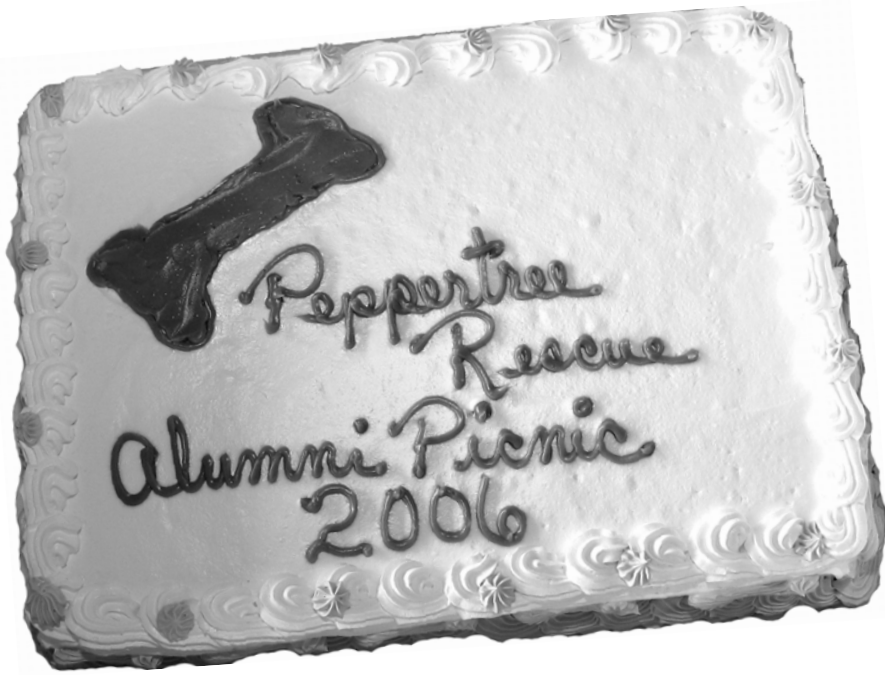
Here are some things that you can do if you're living with an epileptic dog to make sure everyone enjoys and maintains a high quality of life:



1. Keep a record of any seizures your dog has; when, where, how long, and write down as much details as possible to share with your veterinarian.
2. If the dog has a seizure make sure that you have a plan so that everyone is safe, clearing the area of anything that the dog could knock over or bump into, the best thing to do is to monitor, but do not touch. The dog will not swallow its tongue, and chomping during a seizure is involuntary but could lead to a nasty bite for you, or for the dog biting its own tongue. Dogs can remain irritable for a while after the seizure has subsided, reassuring words, or some petting can calm them, but do not attempt to hold or hug them, and definitely keep children away from the dog during this time.
3. Remove any other pets from the area as they can act aggressively toward a seizing pet.
4. Keep the veterinarian information clearly posted so that you can easily call them in an emergency.
5. Create a plan for transporting the dog should the seizure become an emergency.
6. Write down your dog's medication routine and be sure that all of those who are responsible for administering medication are aware of what needs to be done, remember this is a delicate balance and missing one dose can cause the dog to seize.



Peppertree Rescue's 2006 **Picnic for the Dogs** at Shaker Road-Loudonville Fire Department - Saturday, September 16, 2006





Volunteering with a Rescue Group is for Everyone!

In a not too distant past, very few people knew about animal rescue organizations and what these organizations did to assist animals in need.

Today, as a result of pet adoption clinics in more visible sites such as big box pet supplies stores and fund raising events that reach a greater cross-section of society, a growing percentage of people are aware of rescue groups and generally what they do. However, it is probably pretty safe to say that not many people know much about the volunteers who work within rescue organizations.

Most likely a survey of the general population about what type of person volunteers within these groups would likely return the following results. A majority of the respondents would probably assume that most rescue groups have at least some full-time paid staff. Other might think that rescue groups are loosely organized cliques of “do-gooders” who band together for a short period of time to try and make a difference. They would also likely associate rescue volunteers with either the “cat lady” or zealot stereotype. That is, the odd person who lives down the block and collects animals or the hard core animal rights activist. In fact, none of these perceptions could be further from the truth.

Most animal rescue organizations are ongoing incorporated organizations that are staffed entirely by unpaid volunteers. While the terms incorporated organization and unpaid volunteers might sound contradictory, in reality it simply means that the unpaid volunteers are working very hard to run reputable, responsible and professional groups. This revelation might lead one to then wonder about these volunteers who have taken such painstaking steps to establish and operate these professional groups. They surely can not be a group of cat-collecting misfits?

The fact is the volunteers who work within animal rescue groups are attorneys, accountants, teachers, retirees, stay-at-home moms, state workers, college students, mechanics, and an infinite number of other normal, everyday people. They are your next door neighbor, the guy in the next cubicle over, your kids’ soccer coach, or your boss. While they come from all walks of life, they do share some common values. They have a love of animals. Not necessarily the break into the lab and free the monkeys kind of love for animals, but more the “I really like dogs and there are many strays out there that need good homes” love of animals. Some have a lot of time to give while others can just give a couple of hours a month. These volunteers tend to be very social people who like meeting potential adopters and new volunteers. They are the kind of person who drives two hours to transport a dog to its new home because of the satisfaction on both the dog and adopters’ faces. They also tend to volunteer in a number of different charitable groups outside of animal rescue because they enjoy the camaraderie that comes from working with others to make a small difference in their community.

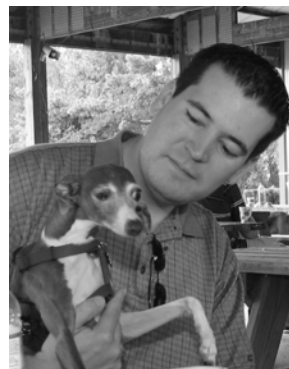
So, if in the back of your mind there is a small ember of desire to assist the many dogs, cats, rabbits or other animals that need new homes, but you were afraid that you might not have much in common with the other volunteers, fear not. Fan that ember and volunteer with a local animal rescue group. You will find that the other volunteers are actually a lot like you. Peppertree Rescue in particular is always interested in recruiting new volunteers. You can specialize in one area or explore many different areas of need within the group. One of the main needs Peppertree has is having available foster homes. Fostering a dog is a unique and rewarding experience. It definitely upsets the balance of your home, but that shake up usually only lasts for a few days until everyone figures out where they fit in the pack order. Fostering gives Peppertree a better idea of

what the dog will behave like in a home environment. It allows you to volunteer while maintaining your regular schedule. Is it difficult to part with that foster dog? Yes it can be, but seeing that dog into its forever home allows you to help the next foster, or it allows you to go back to the peace and serenity of the pre-foster dog situation. What if you can only foster for a few weeks at a time? Perfect, some time in a home is better than no time at all. Foster homes enjoy a maximum amount of flexibility, you only foster when it is convenient for you, when it stops being convenient the dog relocates to another foster home or to boarding at Shaker Veterinary Hospital. What if the foster dog fits so well into your home that you would like to adopt it? We allow that too of course.

If being a foster home seems like more of a commitment than you’re interested in right now, there are plenty of other choices. Volunteers are needed to help out at clinics. In general Peppertree clinics are on the first and third Saturday of the month. For more definite details regarding clinic time and location see www.peppertree.org. Volunteers are needed at these clinics to hold the dogs, walk the dogs, talk to adopters, assist in helping adopters fill out paperwork, and transporting dogs to and from the clinics. Transportation help is also needed occasionally to accept a dog into the program being delivered to us from out of the area, or to deliver it to its adoptive home outside of the Capital District. Have a busy calendar that does not allow for this Saturday time commitment? That’s okay, Shaker Veterinary Hospital is Peppertree’s partner in providing veterinary care as well as boarding. The dogs boarding at Shaker Vet can always use a little extra attention and exercise. Stopping in at Shaker Vet to walk a dog can be done at your convenience, during their business hours. If money is more interesting to you than these other options Peppertree is always exploring new and exciting ways to fundraise so that the important work of

rescue can go on, and expertise in this area is always welcome. Obviously since you are reading it you also know that Peppertree has a quarterly newsletter, if you have a journalism scratch that you would like to itch, or a great eye with a digital camera your services can be used in the preparation of the newsletters. Whatever you decide to do the first step in volunteering for Peppertree Rescue is to contact Patrice at jennyany413@yahoo.com, she is our volunteer coordinator and can help you decide which is the best way for you to begin volunteering.

by Kevin Wilcox



Donations (Tax-deductible)

Written receipts will automatically be provided for donations of \$50 or more. If you wish a written receipt for audit purposes for amounts less than \$50, please note. Any donations of \$10 or more will automatically be subscribed for 1 year to the Peppertree Post, unless noted that the subscription is not wanted.

Applications (Fostering, Adoption, Volunteer)

Please check here if you wish to: ☐ Foster ☐ Adopt ☐ Volunteer and an application will be mailed or e-mailed to you.

Name _____

e-mail Address _____

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Telephone Number (with area code, please note if day or evening) (____) _____ - _____

Send form & check to: **Peppertree Rescue, P.O. Box 2396, Albany, NY 12220**

(Applications can also be downloaded or copied from our website.)

www.peppertree.org

Thank You SEFA

The State Employees Federated Appeal (SEFA) continues to support Peppertree Rescue as a group eligible for donations through their annual SEFA Campaign. If you are a New York State employee, you can help support Peppertree by having donations made directly from your paycheck to benefit Peppertree.

Please see the booklet for the participating Charities and note Peppertree's code (50-486) on your SEFA form.

All of us (furry and non-furry creatures) thank you!



Hospice Care Needed

Atlas is mellow and good with other dogs. He is not good with cats because, once he is comfortable in the home, he likes to chase them. After coming to Peppertree, Atlas went to a foster home where he has received great love and attention. Unfortunately, Atlas has cancer and the foster home has a working mom and dad. They want him to spend his last few months in a home where someone is around most of the day so he will get the attention he deserves. Peppertree will cover all medical costs. We realize this is not an easy undertaking, but there is something special about knowing you will be the final and best stop for a dog.



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A Rescue For Dogs Of Good Temperament