

DOG Watch

Expert information on medicine, behavior and health from a world leader in veterinary medicine

Vol. 17, No. 1 ♦ January 2013

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Neutering can reduce aggression and reduce the risk of some cancers.

IN THE NEWS ...

AKC foundation gives \$1.7 million for research

The American Kennel Club Canine Health Foundation has approved more than \$1.7 million for 17 research projects, ranging from the causes of periodontitis and the prevention of tick-borne diseases to the treatment of urinary incontinence. The foundation awarded the grants to 13 institutions and universities for studies intended to benefit all dogs.

The research could result in improved diagnoses and treatments, and a greater understanding of the causes of diseases in areas including oncology, cardiology and infectious disease.

Research on cranial cruciate ligament disease will approach it from multiple angles, the CHF says, providing options for treatment, such as stem cell and platelet rich plasma therapies, as well as new evaluation systems, including conformation scores and 3D computer evaluations of the knees. Another project will test a treatment for brain tumors with the goal of translating it to human health care.

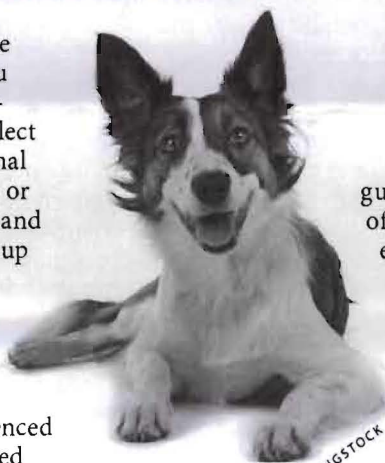
The foundation is supported by the AKC, Nestlé Purina PetCare and Pfizer Animal Health, among others. ♦

When You Want to Adopt a Stray

Recognize that the top concerns are your safety and his security if he becomes anxious in an unfamiliar setting

Your next dog may come into your life when you least expect it. The conventional way to adopt is to select a dog from your local animal shelter, breed rescue group or reputable breeder. But lost and abandoned dogs can show up and become your pet for the rest of their lives. In that moment your eyes meet and you decide to open your car door or beckon him into your fenced backyard, your mind is filled with questions. Among them:

- ♦ What happened to him that caused him to be on his own?



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- ♦ Will he bite me?
- ♦ Does he have any diseases?
- ♦ Does he belong to someone?

You and the veterinarian may guess the dog's age and blend of breeds. A thorough physical examination can provide clues about his health. But you're essentially starting from square one with a canine full of mystery.

Lost and Abandoned.

"We don't see a lot of stray dogs in this country as

we used to. The ones roaming loose on the

(continued on page 4)

The Most Common Neurological Disease

Many illnesses can cause epilepsy, but an array of medications will help manage this difficult condition

Advances in medications have given veterinarians and owners more choices for controlling canine seizures with fewer side effects. The most commonly used medications are phenobarbital, zonisamide and levetiracetam, says neurologist Sofia Cerda-Gonzalez, DVM, Assistant Professor of Neurology and Neurosurgery at the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine. "These anti-epileptic medications modify neural transmission in the brain to reduce the number of seizures an animal experiences."

One of the newest drugs, pregabalin, has shown promise during research, although its effectiveness when used alone hasn't been established. In tests conducted at Cornell, 78 percent of dogs responded to it, compared to 55 percent or less for the anti-convulsant gabapentin.

The cost of pregabalin, however, can vary significantly, depending on the pharmacy, whether the drug is compounded and the dog's size, but overall it is more expensive than many other anti-epileptic drugs, especially for large breeds. A one-month supply for a small Newfoundland, for example, can be \$270.

Extensive Causes. Numerous diseases can lead to seizures. "Typically we divide them into causes outside the brain (for example, metabolic disease — renal, hepatic, hematologic) and those inside the brain," Dr. Cerda-Gonzalez says. The causes in the brain include primary metabolic abnormalities (e.g., storage disorders), idiopathic epilepsy in which there is no apparent cause, cancer,

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SHORT TAKES

A blind, abandoned dog's remarkable story of survival

On the video, it's hard to distinguish the species of the animal lying in trash, then rising slightly at the sound of a woman approaching. One blind eye emerges from the animal's matted hair.

Fiona, an 11-year-old Poodle, was blind, sick, dirty and infested with fleas when Audrey and Eldad Hagar, founders of the Los Angeles-based animal rescue group Hope for Paws, came to her aid. They videotaped finding her behind a body shop in South Los Angeles and her subsequent recovery, and posted it on YouTube. (Use the keywords "blind dog rescue" to view it.)

The Hagars cleaned and cared for Fiona, and took her to a veterinary ophthalmologist. The diagnosis: Surgery could restore vision in one eye. The online rescue video raised money for the procedure. Hundreds of donors worldwide contributed, and Michele and Chris Gentry of Los Angeles soon adopted Fiona to join three Poodle sisters.

"Fiona's miraculous story of survival has since garnered more than 5.5 million views online, a testament to what can be accomplished when homeless animals get a second chance," says the ASPCA.

The society honored her as its 2012 Dog of the Year at a luncheon in New York City celebrating special animals and people who made a significant impact in the lives of animals.

At the end of the video, you can see Fiona, her white coat gleaming, racing the length of a hallway, jumping for joy.



Hundreds of donors around the world contributed to pay for Fiona's treatment after they read her saga online.

Susceptibility to yawning

Research has suggested that contagious yawning in humans, adult chimpanzees, baboons and dogs can be empathetic. Now research from Lund University in Sweden indicates that dogs can "catch" yawns from humans — but only when they're beyond early puppyhood.

Elainie Alenkaer Madsen, Ph.D., and Tomas Persson, Ph.D., enlisted 35 dogs between 4 and 14 months of age in Denmark for the study. They observed the dogs' responses when a person yawned, gaped or did nothing. Only dogs older than 7 months showed contagious yawning. The study, published in the journal "Animal Cognition," found that dogs, like humans, show a developmental trend in susceptibility to contagious yawning, the researchers say, adding that children typically begin the behavior at the age of 4 years, when cognitive abilities, such as identification of others' emotions, become apparent.



I yawn. You yawn. We all yawn.

Results of their study suggest that empathy and mimicry that may underlie it develop slowly over the first year of a dog's life. In an unexpected twist, some researchers may have transferred their yawns' evidence of sleepiness. Nearly half the dogs responded with reduced attention to the extent they had to be prevented from falling asleep. ❖

\$1 million to promote health

The American Veterinary Medical Association will contribute \$1 million to a national campaign promoting the importance of routine veterinary care and the role of veterinary professionals in maintaining pet health.

Despite cat and dog ownership at a record high in the U.S. — with 86 million cats and 78 million dogs — veterinary visits have declined. Fifty-one percent of veterinarians have experienced a decrease in patient visits, according to an extensive Bayer Health Care study in 2011.

The AVMA contribution will go to Partners for Healthy Pets, a program created by its committee on preventive healthcare. It's an alliance of more than 20 veterinary associations and animal health companies.

Be Patient but Purposeful When Giving Medicine

Offering a treat before and afterward, and hiding the pill in a piece of cheese can reduce stress



Hold the upper jaw behind the canine teeth, with the pill between your index finger and thumb. Then put your third or fourth finger near the lower incisors.



Open your dog's mouth and place the pill at the base of his tongue before he can resist. Don't tilt his head — that can inhibit his ability to swallow.



Close the mouth and rub his throat downward to encourage swallowing. You can also blow on his nose or cover his nostrils for a few seconds.

PHOTOS BY DR. SOPHIA YIN

You take your ailing dog to the clinic for a thorough exam. The veterinarian pinpoints the cause and provides a treatment plan for a full recovery. You're relieved until you learn you need to give your dog pills for a specified number of times a day at a specified dose.

Your dog's complete recovery depends on your providing vital medicine, but you're worried he'll resist the pills or spit them out. If only giving medicine would be as easy as teaching your dog to sit on cue. It can — and here to help you learn how to perform the correct steps in the correct sequence are Margaret Schnellinger, licensed veterinary technician and LVT Team Leader at Cornell University Hospital for Animals, and behaviorist Sophia Yin, DVM, in Davis, Calif.

Dr. Yin is also the author of "Low Stress: Handling, Restraint and Behavior Modification of Dogs & Cats" (CattleDog Publishing), a resource with more than 1,600 how-to photographs for veterinarians and veterinary technicians.

Doing its Job. "There is a reason a given medication is prescribed for a certain amount of time," Schnellinger says. "Depending on the medication, it takes

a certain amount of time for the drug to establish certain levels in the bloodstream to do its job and stay at that level long enough to make sure the problem doesn't recur. If treatment is shortened because owners may think that their dog is doing better, they may risk the problem not resolving or recurring."

Before reaching for the medicine bottle, put yourself in the right frame of mind. Be patient but purposeful because your dog can read — and respond — to your emotional state.

"The idea of trying to force a pill into your dog's mouth is not always comfortable for either you or your dog," Dr. Yin says. "Some dogs are difficult to 'pill' because they don't like being restrained or having their mouth opened or the pill does not taste good to them."

In a technique known as counter conditioning, create a positive emotional state in your dog by first offering bite-sized treats. Consult your veterinarian in advance about hiding the pill in a soft piece of cheese or a commercial product such as Pill Pockets. Your goal is to make medicine time a more pleasant experience.

Schnellinger and Dr. Yin offer this step-by-step guide to effectively give

your dog a pill:

Step 1: Grasp your dog's upper jaw behind the canine teeth. If he wiggles or struggles, sit behind him or position him in a corner so that he can't back up.

Step 2: Hold the pill between your index finger and thumb. Place your third or fourth finger in the region of the lower incisors, avoiding the canines.

Step 3: Open your dog's mouth and place the pill at the base of his tongue before he has an opportunity to resist. Avoid tilting his head because that can inhibit swallowing.

Step 4: Close your dog's mouth and rub his throat in a downward stroking motion to help encourage swallowing. You can also blow on his nose or cover his nostrils for a few seconds. Wait to release your hands until he swallows.

Step 5: Follow with treats or water to ensure that the pill doesn't get stuck in the esophagus.

When you need to give pills or capsules to your dog, always remember you have a vital ally in your veterinarian. Don't hesitate to ask for additional tips to ensure your dog receives all the medicine he needs to recover. ♦

STRAY... (continued from cover)

streets are more apt to be abandoned or lost," says Katherine A. Houpt, VMD, Ph.D., former president of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists and emeritus James Law Professor of Animal Behavior at the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine. "But whenever you approach a dog you do not know, you need to be careful to avoid being bitten."

Dr. Houpt shares her expertise to address likely issues when you perform an act of kindness and adopt a dog in need. Your top priority: your safety. "Read the dog's body language and make sure his muscles are not tense, that his ears are not flattened against his head and that his tail is not down or stiff," she says. "These are signs the dog may not be friendly or may be a fearful biter if he feels he has been cornered and can't escape. If you see any of this, please contact animal control officers. They are paid to deal with stray dogs and know how to catch them safely."

Your body posture is also critical. Dogs excel at reading body language and moods. Don't stare directly in their eyes or lean over from the waist to pet them on the head. They can misinterpret these actions as threatening and may lunge and bite. Instead, stand still and call the dog in a friendly voice. Crouch down for a small dog, but stand during initial meetings with unfamiliar large dogs to avoid being knocked over.

Keep a spare leash in your vehicle or buy an inexpensive slip loop leash from

an animal shelter or dog training center. Also, keep a sealed bag of healthy treats you can use to lure a dog toward you. If the dog is friendly, leash him in the middle or back seat of your vehicle while transporting him and then keep him in your fenced backyard or an enclosed room of your home, such as a mud room, patio or large bathroom. The goal is to make him feel secure while keeping you safe.

Next, don't assume the dog is abandoned because he isn't wearing a collar. He could have slipped his collar and dashed out the front door of his house. If you prefer to keep him, still report him to your local shelter. Then have him checked for a microchip. Information on the chip, if found, includes the owner's contact and the dog's veterinarian.

"Found Dog." Dr. Houpt also recommends putting up "Found Dog" posters — in a bright, easily seen color — around town with your cellphone number, description of the dog and the location where you found him. You can also alert neighbors and post online notes on sites such as www.missing-petpartnership.org. And look for "Lost Dog" signs in your area.

During the transition when you don't know if you're temporarily caregiving or adopting the dog, Dr. Houpt suggests that you:

- ◆ Spend the first day with him as he adjusts to a strange environment with new sounds, sights and smells.



Gates especially made for dogs — this one for jumpers — can separate them from potential hazards and other animals.

- ◆ Dog-proof your home before leaving for work. Shut bedroom and bathroom doors and install doggy gates. Introduce your dog into different parts of your home. Put garbage cans out of reach. Remove breakable items from coffee and end tables.
- ◆ Don't shower him with treats or happy talk. Speak in a calm, confident tone to ease his possible feelings of uneasiness or anxiety.
- ◆ Provide quality dog food, but don't overfeed. Large portions or excessive treats can upset his stomach. If you decide to keep the dog, work with the veterinarian to transition him to a diet that best meets his age, breed, health condition and activity level.
- ◆ Brush his coat and reward him with a healthy treat afterward.
- ◆ Book a veterinary appointment within a few days. Expect to spend \$100 to \$200 on a physical examination, core vaccinations, and preventives and possible treatment for parasites. If after a reasonable time, no owner has claimed the dog, schedule a neutering.

"The top veterinary concerns besides parasites may be kennel cough or influenza," Dr. Houpt says. "Fortunately, parasites can be remedied quickly and effectively."

You may have to wait several weeks or a few months before the dog's true personality emerges. "Secondhand dogs are much more likely to have anxiety," Dr. Houpt says. "Some may have escaped

MAKING SAFE INTRODUCTIONS

If you have a dog or cat, or both, you need to introduce the rescued dog slowly to keep everyone safe. Dr. Houpt also advises that you:

- ◆ Separate them initially with closed doors or baby gates.
- ◆ Feed them at the same time on either side of a baby gate so they can see one another during a pleasant experience.
- ◆ Pet two dogs at the same time and team up with a family member or friend to take them on walks together.
- ◆ Until they show consistent signs of getting along, keep the new dog on a leash when in the same room as your cat, making sure the cat has quick access for escape, such as under your bed or on a sturdy piece of cat furniture. Also, keep the pets in separate rooms or crates when you leave home to prevent fights and injuries.

Why Do They ... Eat Grass?

Speculation runs from inducing vomiting to increasing fiber, but there's no nutritional benefit

This is the first in an occasional series exploring the reasons for dogs' often intriguing behavior. If you would like to submit a question, please write to DogWatch Editor, 800 Connecticut Ave., Norwalk, CT 06854, or email dogwatcheditor@cornell.edu.

Owners and veterinarians have long speculated about the reasons dogs eat grass. Given that some dogs vomit after ingesting grass, one popular theory is that they're trying to rid themselves of rancid food or clear a queasy stomach. Others theorize the dogs are trying to get more fiber in their diet.

"I have been asked this question many times by concerned pet owners," says Andrea N. Johnston, DVM, DACVIM, a clinical instructor in internal medicine at the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, "and the truth is we don't really know why dogs eat grass. It may be multifactorial. If it is pathologic behavior or frequently followed by vomiting, it would be best to rule out the medical causes of pica [the ingestion of non-food objects]."

Inconsistent Findings. Another possible explanation is that dogs simply

like to eat grass, and sharp blades of grass cause vomiting. "I have heard this theory and witnessed my own dogs consuming grass and subsequently vomiting," Dr. Johnston says. "It is possible that the texture of the grass is emetogenic [inducing vomiting], but this is not a consistent finding. Some pets consume grass without vomiting."

It's also unlikely grass provides roughage or nutrients that might be missing from the dog's diet, Dr. Johnston says. "Most commercial diets contain adequate amounts of insoluble fiber, but I have read one case report that documented a reduction in grass eating behavior in one dog switched to a diet higher in fiber. However, there is no nutritional benefit to grass consumption, and no research studies address the issue."



BIGSTOCK

Maybe they just like the taste.

A potential health risk does exist, though, Dr. Johnston says. "I recommend that owners limit grass consumption due to concerns about chemicals used in lawn care and fertilizers in the soil that could be toxic to dogs. Additionally, infectious organisms such as parasites may persist in the soil and grass."

As for those commercial grass-growing kits for pets: "I generally recommend offering fresh or cooked vegetables to dogs to increase their fiber intake first, but assuming the soil and grass in the kit do not contain any potentially toxic compounds, this may be a viable solution." ♦

BEHAVIOR

STRAY... (continued from page 4)

from their original houses and may try to escape from your house, too. Introduce crate training and make it positive. Or consider limiting where the dog is in your home while you're gone by using baby gates."

Another behavior concern: acting territorial. A dog may position himself in front of a window and bark at passers-by or anyone at the front door. Limit his reactive responses by keeping the front window blinds closed and moving the furniture away from the window to prevent him from perching on it to elevate his status. In addition, consider playing music on low volume to mute outdoor noise when you leave.



BIGSTOCK

Within a few days of your taking in a new dog, he should have a veterinary exam, core vaccinations and parasite preventives.

A dog may display territoriality when he feels at home, Dr. Houpt says. "Counter that by enrolling him in a basic obedience class and being consistent with the commands in the home."

When introducing house guests, initially keep the dog on a leash and reward him for sitting by giving him a small treat, Dr. Houpt says. "The dog starts associating the welcomed guest with good food and begins to regard the person as being all right."

When you adopt an abandoned or lost dog, you don't know his past, but with training and veterinary care, you can bring out the best for his future and share a bond that lasts for years. ♦

MEDICINE... (continued from the cover)

cysts, vascular accidents, malformations, encephalitis and head trauma.

Because of seizures' many possible causes, "They are one of the most common manifestations of neurological disease in the dog, and idiopathic epilepsy is the most common cause of seizures in the dog," Dr. Cerda-Gonzalez says. It's estimated that the incidence of idiopathic epilepsy in dogs is 1 to 5 percent.

Idiopathic epilepsy has a genetic link in some breeds. Among the affected breeds are Dachshunds, Collies, German Shepherd Dogs, Beagles, Belgian Tervurens and Golden and Labrador Retrievers.

The two types of seizures are generalized, affecting the entire body, and focal or partial, affecting only a part or one side of the body. During a generalized seizure, the dog may fall on his side, involuntarily move his legs, particularly in a paddling fashion, urinate, defecate and drool, and be unaware of his surroundings — although not all dogs show all these signs.

The symptoms of focal seizures vary. "For example, they may involve twitching of the facial muscles and chomping movements of the jaw, or may instead involve movements of one or more limbs," Dr. Cerda-Gonzalez says.

Before a seizure, the dog may sense a change and stay close to the owner for

comfort. This is an advantage because the dog undergoing a seizure may need the owner's help to avoid harm, particularly if he is near stairs, a lake or swimming pool.

Just as seizures vary among dogs, so does their recovery. "Most commonly after a generalized seizure, animals are frequently blind, so they may bump into things as they try to walk around," Dr. Cerda-Gonzalez says. "They may also seem to be out of it, less aware of their surroundings. They may be hungry, and they may lose their house training."

"Kindling Effect." The potential for dangerous consequences from a seizure itself depends on its length, number

THE MOST COMMON ANTI-SEIZURE DRUGS

Several medications are available to control seizures, so that if one doesn't work well for your dog, his veterinarian can prescribe another.

"Also, most of these medications can be compounded these days into either oral suspensions or flavored tablets. The following drugs are most often prescribed," says Sofia Cerda-Gonzalez, DVM, ACVIM (Neurology), at Cornell:

Phenobarbital

- ◆ A barbiturate with anticonvulsant properties.
- ◆ Long history as first choice to manage seizures.
- ◆ No veterinary formulation but legally prescribed by veterinarians.
- ◆ Available as tablets, liquid and injection.
- ◆ The most common possible side effects are drowsiness, increased thirst and urination, and increased appetite. More rarely: itchy skin, liver toxicity and hematologic changes.

Potassium bromide

- ◆ In use more than a century.
- ◆ Available as tablets and liquid.
- ◆ Relatively common possible side effects include vomiting, pancreatitis, inappetence, increased thirst and urination, and increased appetite.

Pregabalin (Lyrica)

- ◆ Used with phenobarbital or as a sole agent.
- ◆ Can also be used as a treatment of neuropathic pain.
- ◆ Available as a tablet.
- ◆ Reported side effects include sedation, weakness and lack of coordination.

Gabapentin (Neurontin)

- ◆ Can be used with phenobarbital or potassium bromide, or alone as a treatment for neuropathic pain.
- ◆ Treats pain and seizures, although at different dosages.
- ◆ Given orally as tablet or capsule.
- ◆ Most common side effect is drowsiness.

Felbamate (Felbatol)

- ◆ Available in liquid form for oral administration.
- ◆ Side effects may include drowsiness, vomiting, nausea, liver toxicity and dry eye.

- ◆ Infrequently used due to its side effects, cost and frequency of administration.

Zonisamide (Zonegran)

- ◆ Available in capsules.
- ◆ Used with phenobarbital or alone.
- ◆ The most common side effects are mild drowsiness and loss of appetite. Uncommonly, liver toxicity may be seen.

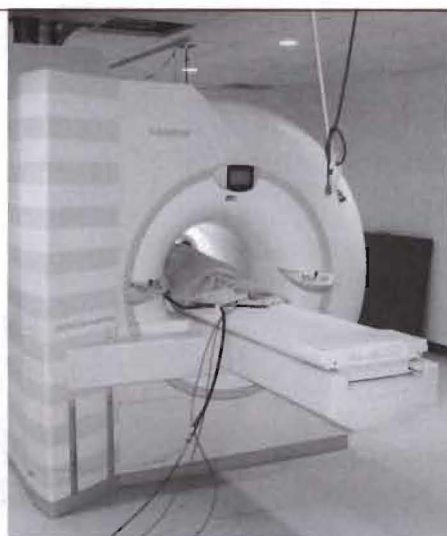
Levetiracetam (Keppra)

- ◆ Available in intravenous formulation.
- ◆ Used with phenobarbital or alone.
- ◆ No known drug interactions.
- ◆ Little long-term information is available, but it appears that over time the drug may lose its effectiveness in some animals.
- ◆ Side effects are rare, though drowsiness is possible.



HELEN PEPPE PHOTOGRAPHY

Beagles are among breeds with a genetic link to idiopathic epilepsy, which has no known cause.



After taking a medical history, veterinarians will order tests, such as an MRI of the brain, to determine the cause of epilepsy.

and severity. “We typically consider generalized seizures to be an emergency if they last more than five minutes or if their number exceeds two in a row,” Dr. Cedra-Gonzalez says. “Also, repeated seizure activity has the potential to engender more seizure activity — a kindling effect — so in general it is best to limit the number of seizures as much as possible. We apply these guidelines to our epileptics who are currently being treated for seizures and whose owners are trying to decide whether to bring the animal to a veterinary hospital for emergency management of their seizures.”

In contrast, any dog experiencing seizures for the first time should be evaluated by a veterinarian as soon as

possible on an emergency basis. The veterinarian will take a detailed medical history to determine the cause. Tests may include an MRI of the brain, an examination of spinal fluid or a CT scan.

Other detective work, such as blood tests, is needed to find non-neurological origins of seizures.

Challenging Causes. “Certain causes of seizures can prove to be more of a challenge than others, particularly infectious diseases,” Dr. Cerda-Gonzalez says. “With some infectious diseases, it can be difficult to differentiate an active infection from previous exposure to an infectious agent. Also, some diseases can mask themselves as another disease

process. For example, infection with a cuterebra larva can at times be difficult to differentiate from a primary vascular accident [a clot or other interference in blood circulation that affected neurons in the brain].”

The owner’s detailed observation of seizures and how the dog behaves before, during, and after the seizure is important in

SEIZURES CAN START WITH RESTLESSNESS

Seizures consist of three phases:

- ◆ **Aura:** This phase immediately before the seizure may last only minutes. In it, the dog may become restless, stay close to the owner or hide.
- ◆ **Ictus:** Dogs become unaware of their surroundings in this phase. Their eyes may dilate, the face and body muscles may twitch, and legs may move or become rigid. They may attack invisible objects, run or collide with objects.
- ◆ **Post-ictus:** In the recovery phase, the dog may seem disoriented, even temporarily blind. The length of this phase varies from a few minutes to a few days.

differentiating a seizure from other, similar appearing conditions, such as a vestibular syndrome and movement disorders.

A selection of medications can modulate neural transmission in the brain to reduce the number and severity of seizures. “The goal of medication is to reduce the frequency and severity of seizures by at least 50 percent,” Dr. Cerda-Gonzalez says. “In addition, we aim for the animal experiencing less than one seizure per six weeks.”

Idiopathic epilepsy can’t be cured. In cases in which a primary cause for seizures exist, the cause can sometimes be eliminated, but a seizure focus — the area of the cerebral cortex responsible for causing epileptic seizures — might have been established and they will continue. In both cases, dogs will need regular veterinary checkups and medication for the rest of their lives. The medication can be discontinued in some dogs, but this is a rarity. The encouraging news is that research continues to improve the effectiveness of a growing number of treatment choices. ♦

WHAT TO TELL THE VETERINARIAN

The more details about your dog’s seizures that you give his veterinarian, the better he or she can diagnose and treat them. Here’s a short list to provide at the exam:

- ◆ Your dog’s appearance when he’s having a seizure.
- ◆ The seizures’ frequency and length.
- ◆ His activities before each seizure.
- ◆ Any signs of other illness.
- ◆ Any history of injury.
- ◆ Food consumption and frequency.
- ◆ Changes in behavior.
- ◆ Exposure to toxins or other animals.



Katherine A. Houpt, VMD, Ph.D., diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists and emeritus James Law Professor of Animal Behavior at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, provided the answers on this page.

Please Share Your Questions
We welcome questions of general interest on health, medicine and behavior. We regret however, that we cannot comment on specific products and prior diagnoses. Please send correspondence to:

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COMING UP ...

DENTAL DISEASE



EAR INFECTIONS



WEIGHT LOSS
IN SENIORS



CANNED VS.
DRY FOOD

Neutering's many benefits

Q I am the proud owner of two St. Bernards. Chief is 3, and Dante, 1. They get along great, but I'm worried they might seriously fight once the pup reaches maturity. Would you suggest I have one or both neutered?

A You are absolutely correct to expect that behaviors and relationships might adjust as Dante reaches maturity (usually at 18 to 24 months in dogs). It sounds as if they get along swimmingly now. Unfortunately, aggressive behaviors, once established, can be difficult to cure, so it is best to prevent rather than treat these problems.

Implementing good training for both pets is always beneficial. This will establish your leadership and allow control in difficult situations (i.e., getting your dog to respond to a sit-stay command on a busy street). Neutering is a good option for both dogs, especially as it eliminates the risk of some cancers and decreases the risk of others.

Neutering also reduces aggressive tendencies, especially aggression between two males, as well as mounting behaviors and the tendency to urine-mark (leg-lift) in the house. Most important, they will not try to roam in search of females in heat. Neutering a dog can change his standing in the pack, but altering both dogs could avoid this.

If despite all efforts, quarreling does ensue, it is safest to resist the temptation to intervene and let the dogs work it out themselves. Supporting the subordinate dog can severely worsen aggression. If Dante challenges Chief and appears to have claimed the place of "alpha dog," support this natural pack behavior and acknowledge his status by feeding him first. Of course, if any signifi-

cant behavior issues should arise, or if any blood is drawn, seek professional help as soon as possible.

Katherine A. Houpt, VMD, Ph.D., DACVB
Cornell University

Inter-dog aggression

Q I am at a loss about my 4-year-old Australian Terrier I rescued when she was 7 months old. Lola has always been sweet and loving until recently. Last year we gave my parents a Yorkie. The dogs spent time together, but now Lola has become extremely aggressive to the other dog — growling and roughing her up. I worry she might hurt the Yorkie or another dog. She even snapped at me when I tried to take her away from the other dog.

A Lola is suddenly being aggressive to a dog with whom she formerly had good relations because the Yorkie is now grown up, no longer a puppy, so your dog is no longer tolerant. Aggression to a familiar dog in your home or your parents' home does not necessarily mean she'll be aggressive to strange dogs. It is not surprising she snapped at you. She was highly aroused and redirected the aggression meant for the Yorkie to you.

For now, you should always have a leash on Lola in the Yorkie's presence so you can drag her away if necessary without endangering your hands. The positive thing to do whenever the other dog is within 10 feet is to give your dog a treat. I would get a muzzle for her and introduce it when she is calm, and the other dog is not nearby. A basket muzzle is best because you can smear the inside tip of the muzzle with chicken baby food, peanut butter or other treats. It's not a punishment but a safety measure when the Yorkie is present. ♦

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