



Senior years



We have all heard that old adage which says for every year we age, our pets age seven. Although there are some species, breed, and individual differences to consider, this old saying is a good rule of thumb for assessing our

companion's age. In fact, in veterinary medicine, we consider any dog or cat eight years or older to be in their senior years. Of course, most pets live well beyond eight years. However, it is at this age that we begin to anticipate changes associated with aging - changes in metabolic health, liver and kidney function, cardiovascular and pulmonary health as well as the ever worrisome specter of malignancy. The good news is that there are resources available to more fully evaluate our pets as they enter their golden years. How many of us would wait seven years to have a check up with our physician? Veterinarians now recommend that all pets eight years of age or older have a thorough physical exam every six months. In addition, a geriatric work-up is recommended on an annual basis. This consists of a complete blood count, a biochemical profile of metabolic health, a urine analysis, and survey radiographs of the chest and abdomen. Many medical problems, if detected early, are quite manageable. If your companion has reached those golden years, consider setting up an appointment for a geriatric assessment.

Seizures in Pets

Witnessing a seizure can be a frightening experience for a pet owner. Understanding the causes of seizures as well as what to expect with treatment can help to alleviate one's fear.

What does a seizure look like?

Seizures can manifest as abnormal behaviors, such as aggression or biting at the air, or simply twitching of the facial muscles. The most common type of seizure is generalized in which the entire brain becomes quickly involved with quite dramatic results. There often will be a period before the seizure when

the animal may be restless, "clingy," or hide. As the seizure begins the animal loses consciousness and falls to the ground with extended legs, arched neck, and repetitive paddling movements of the limbs. Some animals will vocalize, urinate, defecate, or salivate. Usually this active stage lasts under two minutes, although it may seem much longer. After this active phase is complete the recovery can take a few minutes to several hours, during which the pet may be confused, disoriented or even seem blind.

What causes seizures?

Seizures are caused by hyperexcitability of the brain from a variety of causes such as any abnormal area of the brain from a previous or ongoing head trauma, active infection or inflammation of the brain or surrounding membranes, anatomical abnormalities such as hydrocephalus or a brain tumor. Sometimes, the cause of the hyperexcitability is located outside the brain. Certain toxins and some metabolic diseases (particularly those of the liver and kidney) can lead to alterations in the biochemistry of the brain resulting in seizures. Sometimes no cause can be found and is the most common scenario in young animals which appear normal between seizures. This type of seizure disorder is called "idiopathic epilepsy" and, while rare in cats, is known to be inherited in certain breeds of dogs.

What to do?

When an animal is having a seizure, it is not consciously aware of what is happening. The most important things for a pet owner to do is to stay calm, remove any items from the pet's immediate vicinity which may be knocked over and cause injury, and make a mental record of the duration of the seizure. Pets do not swallow their tongues and, in fact, may inadvertently bite an owner mistakenly trying to prevent this. After the seizure has passed, the pet should be evaluated by a veterinarian. However, if the seizure persists more than five minutes, it should be immediately taken to receive medical attention. Gently moving the pet onto a blanket and using it as a hammock is the safest way to transport a seizing pet.

What will the veterinarian do?

An animal that has seized should be evaluated to determine if there are any clues as to the underlying cause. A neurological

exam to test for any other neurological problems and laboratory tests will be performed. In young, otherwise healthy pets the diagnosis of "idiopathic epilepsy" is often made at this point because so many of the other conditions can be ruled out with these few simple tests. In some animals further testing is needed with a neurological specialist. Any pet that is having multiple seizures in rapid succession, a seizure lasting longer than five minutes, or seizing after a period of illness should be treated as an emergency and veterinarian help sought immediately.

What will happen long term?

Idiopathic epilepsy is the most common seizure disorder. The course of treatment depends on the seizure frequency, duration, and severity. For animals that have very occasional seizures, monitoring at home with a careful log describing these seizure characteristics may be all that is initially warranted. This information should be regularly shared with the veterinarian as it is needed in making long term treatment recommendations. For more frequent (greater than once every 6 weeks) or prolonged seizures (greater than five minutes) drug therapy will be prescribed.

What medications will be used and what should you expect?

The first choice in treatment is phenobarbital which is very effective in controlling seizures and is relatively inexpensive. It does have some side effects which include sedation and increased hunger and thirst. These usually subside as the animal's body adapts to the drug. Less commonly there are more serious side effects involving the liver or bone marrow. For this reason, it is important to monitor the patient with regular blood tests. If adequate control is not established with phenobarbital an additional drug may be used. It is important to understand that "controlled" animals might have an occasional seizure. The goal of therapy is to minimize seizures and prevent them from worsening.

What is the prognosis?

The prognosis for an animal with seizures varies greatly with the underlying cause. For animals with idiopathic epilepsy the prognosis is generally good as long as the seizures can be controlled with medication.

Staff News

Welcome...

Originally from Greensboro, GA, **Brent Credille** has lived in Athens for the past four years while earning a BSA in Biological Science from The University of Georgia. Brent will be attending the UGA College of Veterinary Medicine this Fall. Brent is an avid outdoor sportsman but finds one of his greatest joys is the companionship of his dog, Bailey.

After graduating from UGA with a degree in Speech Language Pathology in 2002, **Amy Messer** began to work and travel around the United States. Through her extensive experience with equine and other farm animals, Amy realized her passion and love for working with both animals and people. She returned to Georgia in January to explore the field of Veterinary Medicine. In her spare time Amy enjoys reading, running, gardening, and horseback riding.

Andrea Leach is a native of Ft. Worth, Texas who earned a B.S. in Biology from the University of Texas at Austin and an M.S. in Botany from the University of Georgia. It was during her graduate studies that Andrea came to realize her life-long dream of working in veterinary medicine. Andrea hopes to enter the UGA College of Veterinary Medicine in the Fall of 2005. Between jobs, Andrea enjoys reading, watching movies, jogging, and hanging out with her cat and three dogs.

Ellen Des Jardines, who joined the staff in March, was born in New Jersey and spent her childhood moving around the country as her father was a career Marine Corps officer. She has spent her professional career working with individuals with disabilities and in the field of art. Ellen is a member of Collie Rescue of Metro Atlanta, Inc. having four Collies of her own, along with one Golden Retriever and two cats.

Farewell...

After two years as a receptionist and veterinary assistant at Shoal Creek Animal Clinic, **Whitney vonKutzleben** will be leaving this summer when her family relocates to Arizona. Whitney's ever present optimism and good cheer will be missed by all. We will also be bidding a fond farewell to **Jason Ballenger** this summer. Jason has combined his study of medical health with his love of physical fitness and will be pursuing a career in personal health and fitness training. Many have enjoyed Jason's comic creation "Family Practice" on our web pages (<http://www.shoalcreek.com/comic>). Jason says he will continue to draw comics in the future, so stay tuned for more adventures of Dr. Barkley.

Traffic Tips

It has been many years coming but the first phase of SPLOST IV, Project 22, also known as the Barnett Shoals Widening Project, is soon to be complete. We have all patiently endured the hardships and frustrations of construction and are anxiously awaiting an end to the traffic congestion, noise, and mess. Athens-Clarke County officials share that the project is on schedule and anticipate a ribbon cutting ceremony mid-summer. However, Shoal Creek clients need not wait until then to benefit from some of the traffic improvements. There is now an alternate route out of our parking lot which can be

taken to avoid some of the danger and congestion during high traffic times of day. By carefully navigating behind the clinic, one can take advantage of new interconnectivity between businesses on the Barnett Shoals corridor. Even that most difficult of turns - North on Barnett Shoals - will become a much safer proposition with the new traffic signal to be placed across from Green Acres Shopping Center. See the illustration below for some suggested routes during high traffic times. Remember to drive **slowly** and **carefully** through these alternate routes as these areas are primarily through business parking lots and have high pedestrian traffic.



This diagram illustrates some of the new interconnectivity between businesses along the Barnett Shoals Road corridor.



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