

STROKES IN DOGS AND CATS

By W. Jean Dodds, DVM on March 24, 2019

With the untimely passing of actor Luke Perry, awareness of strokes came into the spotlight. Can dogs and cats have strokes? Yes; they can. Here's what you need to know.

TYPES

Just like humans, dogs and cats can have one of two types of stroke: ischemic or hemorrhagic.

Ischemic

Ischemic strokes are caused by a blood clot, called a thrombus, which forms inside one of the brain's arteries. The clot then blocks blood flow to a part of the brain. However, unlike humans, its typically only involve the smaller blood vessels in pets. An embolism is a small blood clot (or piece of atherosclerotic plaque debris in people) that develops elsewhere in the body and then travels through the bloodstream to one of the blood vessels in the brain.

Hemorrhagic Stroke

There are two types of hemorrhagic strokes: intracerebral and subarachnoid.

An intracerebral hemorrhagic stroke occurs when a blood vessel inside the brain bursts and leaks blood into the surrounding brain tissue.

Subarachnoid strokes are typically caused by an aneurysm, which refers to a weakening of an artery wall that creates a bulge, or distention, of the artery. This type of stroke involves bleeding in the area between the brain and the tissue covering the brain, known as the subarachnoid space.

SIGNS

The symptoms or signs of strokes are similar in dogs and cats. They are rare and usually occur in geriatric pets.

Cats

- Abnormal eye movements
- Altered mental status
- Circling
- Head pressing
- Head tilt
- Muscle spasms
- Not using the legs normally
- Seizures
- Unequal pupil sizes
- Unsteadiness when walking
- Weakness

Dogs

- Abnormal behavior
- Abnormal eye movements
- Abnormal eye positioning

Blindness
Falling to one side
Head tilt
Inability to walk or walking with an uncoordinated gait
Loss of consciousness

CAUSES

Cats

Brain tumors
Cancer
Diabetes
Heart disease
High blood pressure
Hyperthyroidism
Kidney disease
Liver disease
Lung disease
Vestibular disease

Dogs

Bleeding disorders
Cancer
Cushing's disease (hyperadrenocorticism)
Diabetes
Heart disease
High blood pressure
High and prolonged doses of steroids like prednisone
Hypothyroidism, severe
Kidney disease
Vestibular disease

PREVENTION

A stroke is usually caused by an underlying disease. The best preventative measure is to monitor the pet periodically in order to diagnose the disease before a stroke can occur. Disease diagnosis involves twice yearly check-ups in geriatrics and annually in younger pets, which includes routine blood, endocrine and urinalysis screening.

WHAT TO DO IN THE EVENT OF A STROKE

If you think your companion dog or cat has suffered from a stroke, please take him or her to a veterinarian as soon as possible. As well, we recommend that you always keep the phone number and address of your area emergency veterinarian on hand for all pet related emergencies.

<https://www.hemopet.org/strokes-dogs-cats/>