

WELSH SPRINGER SPANIEL JOINT HEALTH GROUP

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DISEASES AFFECTING THE WELSH SPRINGER SPANIEL FACT SHEET 2 – EPILEPSY

WHAT IS EPILEPSY?

Epilepsy is not a single condition. It is a term used to describe recurrent fits, seizures or convulsions.

WHAT SIGNS SHOULD I LOOK FOR?

The symptoms vary with the severity of the seizures and range from un-coordinated movements to the dog collapsing with rigid leg movements and salivating excessively. The dog may also lose control of its bowel and bladder. Attacks may last a few seconds or longer and the dog may appear unconscious. In very severe cases, the dog has one fit after another – this is called ‘status epilepticus’.

WHAT IS THE USUAL AGE FOR THE PROBLEM TO APPEAR?

The onset of Primary Epilepsy is usually between one and three years of age but this is only a guide and cases do occur earlier and later; up to around the age of five years.

WHAT CAUSES EPILEPSY?

- **Secondary Epilepsy:** This describes those cases where a cause such as trauma, brain tumour, liver disease etc. is diagnosed.
- **Primary Epilepsy:** In cases where no apparent cause is found then the term ‘idiopathic’ or primary epilepsy is used. In these cases the dog’s genetic make-up is such that they have spontaneous seizures. In Primary Epilepsy, the ‘faulty’ copy of the gene must be inherited from the father **and** mother.

IS THERE ANY TREATMENT?

Control of fitting is by the use of drugs e.g. one commonly used is pheno-barbitone. The vet will endeavour to find a dose that will control the fitting but enable the dog to live a normal life.

HOW DO I ENSURE THE PUPPY I BUY WILL NOT FIT?

This is not possible at the moment. Primary Epilepsy is thought to be an inherited condition caused by a recessive gene or genes. At present there is no conclusive test for the presence of this gene or genes in individual dogs.

WHAT IF MY DOG STARTS TO FIT?

Contact your vet for the appropriate treatment. Also contact the breeder of your dog: They will want to be aware of the problem and will forward all relevant information to the Joint Health Group to aid research being undertaken into Epilepsy (see below).

INVESTIGATION OF PRIMARY EPILEPSY IN THE WELSH SPRINGER SPANIEL

Research at the Animal Health Trust and other institutions as part of the Canine Genome Project has produced a genetic map for the dog. Information from markers on this map will help the study of canine genetic disorders. By this means ('DNA fingerprinting') it is hoped to pin-point the genes involved in Epilepsy. A blood test might then be produced to identify carrier dogs before breeding. For many years blood samples, or cheek swabs, taken from fitting Welsh Springers Spaniels and their immediate family have been sent to the AHT for inclusion in this work. Owners of fitting dogs, their parents and siblings, are strongly advised to submit cheek swabs to the AHT. Cheek swabs may be obtained from the Secretary (Name and contact details at the beginning of this leaflet).

BREED GUIDELINES

It is recommended that parents of known fitters should not be bred from again and that extra care needs to be taken when breeding from the siblings of fitters. The Joint Health Group has compiled a list of matings that have produced fitting puppies. This has been published in the current Year Book of the WSS Club and the Newsletters of the other Breed Clubs.

Dated: February 2013

**Other fact sheets are produced by the WSS Joint Health Group.
Contact the Secretary for further information.**