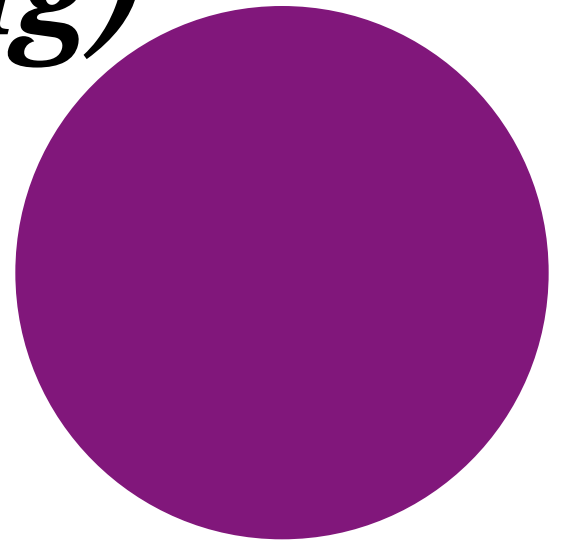


*IF I KNEW
THEN WHAT I
KNOW NOW*

*(I still wouldn't
change a thing)*



Written by Deanne Tanksley and Edited by Billy Tanksley

The world of canine epilepsy can be a scary one. Witnessing your first seizure can be downright frightening. You feel helpless, and possibly hopeless. Any parent, pet or human, has the desire to “make everything okay”, and that can be tough.

There are a lot of resources available to you help navigate in this new world in which you find yourself. Your pet is counting on you. Hopefully, we can share in this book some items to add to your arsenal and help you be the best you can be.

1. Find a neurologist.

Just like in the human world, different doctors specialize in different things. While your general veterinarian may be just perfect for annual exams and vaccinations, he or she may not be up on the latest news as it relates to canine epilepsy. New research is ongoing and those trained in this specific discipline will be more likely to have the latest, most current, information in this area.

Most people think using a neurologist is too expensive. It is true, their services are not inexpensive, but don't overlook your closest college with a veterinary program. The professors teaching should be staying up to date on the latest trends, and teaching their students the same. Often their services can come at a discount, without sacrificing the quality of care.

2. Find a new vet, if you have to.

Treating and managing canine epilepsy is a group effort. As we said, adding a neurologist to your team is critical, but is usually only successful if your general vet is open and receptive, and acknowledges that they may need a boost in this area. If your general vet does not welcome a team member, then you may consider finding a new one.

Likewise, if your general veterinarian is resistant to change or unwilling to work with you, then you have to seek a different one. Some vets give up way too early. Epilepsy does not always mean a death sentence for your dog, but it takes time and effort to work through all the different nuances of this disorder. If your vet is doesn't want to make that investment, then find one who will.

Remember, finding a new vet is much easier than losing a valued family member!

3. Arm yourself!

With research, articles, questions, anything and everything! You are the only voice your dog will have and it is critical that you use it. Subscribe to newsletters, find Facebook or other social media groups, seek out websites. Check your local library or bookstore for reference material.

Gather as much information as you can and bring it to your vet for clarification.

Sometimes our vets are only as smart as we help them to be. Some of them welcome learning new things in a challenging discipline. They can ferret through all the technical terms, and what you find may not be appropriate in your situation, but bring it to them. Your vet sees countless clients every day and may not have the time, if not the impetus, to spend the time researching that you can do for them.

4. Don't be afraid of change.

There are lots of drugs on the markets for canine epilepsy. This is not a one drug fits all world. If your vet wants to try something new, be open to it, but don't be afraid to say if it isn't working. Your pup's life, or at least the quality of life, may be at stake and it is up to you to say yes or no. We tend to fall into the trap that our vets know best but they need information as well. In our case, our Riley was metabolizing one drug faster than the baseline expectation. By sharing some information from his log, our vet tested the half-life and learned that the benefits of the drug were not lasting as long as needed and we adjusted the med times and it was the answer to our question at the time.

5. Keep a log.

Tracking seizures can be extremely beneficial. But not just the date and time of the seizure - include environmental changes, weather conditions, stressors, phases of the moon. Anything that you can relate to the date of a seizure could be the key to the treatment plan. Did the exterminator come that day? Was it a full moon? Unexpected company? Anything - ordinary or not.

Seizures can often follow a pattern. The brain can actually do something called “kindling” in which it almost rewires itself to think that seizure activity is “normal” and then it starts to “schedule” it - every two weeks, or once a month, or every day at a specific time even. Breaking these patterns can be literally lifesaving. But you have to be able to recognize them. Nothing is too small. Over time, you will learn what might truly make a difference and what might not but, at first, write it all down. Time of day; length of the seizure; medicine schedule; and so forth. As we said before, noting that the seizures were always occurring within an hour of the medicine time led us to the path of checking the efficacy of the medicine. And it wasn’t lasting long enough. We had the data to analyze and that made all the difference.

6. Nothing is permanent.

Probably the toughest lesson to learn is that everything changes. When we first ventured into this world we were prescribed the standard drug as a first line defense - phenobarbital. We gave it as instructed and the seizures stopped. For a full month, they stopped. My heart was crushed when they started back up and that is how we first learned that sometimes one drug needs another to boost it, or to fill in the gaps for what it can't do.

Everything changes.

Like people, dogs can develop a resistance to a drug. What worked a miracle six months ago may be completely ineffective today. It is easy to fall into the "we have this cured" trap. In fact, you have it "managed".

7. Have faith, and hope.

Riley was estimated to be three or four years old when we found him. We had him just about exactly 9 years, and he passed from old age. His first two years with us were horrible - cluster seizures every two weeks like clockwork. But with changes in his meds and being advocates for him, we hit on the perfect combination and he was rewarded by two seizure-free years. His years after that were, by definition, controlled, meaning no more than once a month.

Never give up.

You pup would never give on you and they deserve the same.

