Strokes

Diagnosing a stroke
The only way to determine if your pet had a stroke is with an MRI conducted by a veterinary neurologist. An MRI provides a detailed diagnosis of the brain that an x-ray or CT-scan cannot.

A spinal tap may also be needed to rule out any type of inflammatory brain disease. Once it has been determined that your pet had a stroke, additional tests are often recommended to check for diseases that can potentially cause a stroke.

Seek immediate emergency care
If you suspect that your dog or cat is having a stroke, seek immediate emergency veterinary care. While there is no specific treatment to reverse the brain damage caused by a stroke, measures can be taken to prevent future strokes and underlying causes can be identified. Strokes can be a symptom of an underlying disease.

In older cats, blood pressure monitoring is especially important due to high incidence of high blood pressure.

Preventing strokes in pets
Causes of strokes in dogs and cats are similar to those for people. They include high blood pressure, heart disease, metabolic disease, Cushing’s disease, clotting abnormalities in the blood, adrenal tumors, cancer, kidney disease, certain infections and coronary artery disease (rare).

Signs that your dog or cat may be having a stroke
Strokes can occur in dogs and cats. The signs of a stroke depend on which part of the brain is affected by the stroke. Your pet may be having a stroke if you observe a very sudden onset of any of these signs:
- Disorientation
- Pacing or circling
- Weakness
- Seizures
- Rapid eye movement
- Wobbliness
- Tremors
- Blindness
- Head tilt

On this MRI, the arrows point to a well demarcated region in the left cerebellum consistent with a stroke.

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Pets can have strokes similar to people
It was once believed that strokes did not occur in animals. However, the increased availability of advanced diagnostics, like MRI, have determined that pets, just like people, experience strokes.

Similarly, strokes tend to occur when pets are middle-aged and older. They also tend to strike suddenly and without warning, though symptoms usually don’t last for more than 24 hours before stabilizing or improving.

In older cats, blood pressure monitoring is especially important due to high incidence of high blood pressure.

Just like in people, early detection and treatment of these diseases may help prevent a stroke. Pets should have routine examinations and general health screenings. Regular blood work, ECG, blood pressure checks and thyroid testing can help identify a number of health issues.

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Indy, pictured here, is a Jack Russell Terrier, in the Kaminskas family of Royal Oak, MI. Indy was referred to the Animal Neurology & MRI Center by Dr. James Mangner of Gasow Veterinary Hospital in Birmingham, Michigan and his family veterinarian Richard Havas of Long Lake Veterinary Hospital in Troy, Michigan due to an episode of panicked behavior. Indy began racing around the house, seemed unable to control his behavior and lost control of urination and defecation. His family had noticed nystagmus (rapid eye movement) and the occasional head tilt and circling behavior. Indy had an MRI of his brain and a spinal tap.

Once the MRI was reviewed by our radiologist, Dr. Wolf could confirm a diagnosis of a stroke. Indy's acute onset of personality and behavioral changes directly correlated with the acute hemorrhage in the cerebral cortex. Indy suffered a stroke in the brain.

Indy was treated with supportive therapy and within a few short days was right on track to being his old self. At his two week recheck, you would never know Indy was having neurologic troubles. He was doing great! Indy continues to do well on medications and since his diagnosis has celebrated his 17th birthday!

Pets often have a better prognosis than people

In general, the prognosis for dogs and cats is better than for people who have experienced a stroke. This is mainly because dogs and cats can still function despite serious brain injury.

Still, pets that have had a stroke need time to recover, good nursing care and physical therapy. Additional therapies should be aimed at managing underlying diseases that could have caused the stroke in the first place. Of course how well your pet responds to treatment depends on the size of the stroke and which part of the brain is affected. Most dogs and cats that are going to recover show significant improvement within 7 to 10 days.

The Animal Neurology & MRI Center is centrally located in the Metro Detroit area

The cerebellum is a common site in the brain in which infarctions occur. These cases display vestibular signs and are often mistaken as idiopathic or geriatric vestibular syndrome. This is why a complete diagnostic work-up, including an MRI should be considered for all older dogs that have an acute onset of vestibular signs.

Board-certified neurologists caring for pets 24/7.

• One trip is all our clients need to make. A cozy long-term waiting room offers Internet, television, and a couch to keep them comfortable. When available, clients may stay overnight with their pets.

• A doctor is with your pet 24/7, this sets us apart from other facilities. Patients are cared for by board-certified neurologists by day and ER veterinarians skilled in caring for neurological patients at night.

• We are one of the few centers in the U.S. with highly advanced on-site diagnostics including MRI & CT scans read by board-certified radiologists.

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Office hours: Mon - Fri: 9am - 6pm, Sat: 9am - 6pm
We are open for emergencies 24 hours a day, 7 days a week including holidays.

For the veterinarian

Ask us about CE opportunities for your hospital and staff.

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