

Points on Pets: Strokes can strike dogs

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: Because our old dog has had several episodes that resemble strokes in humans, we are wondering if strokes occur in animals. Our old dog has demonstrated partial paralysis of his left side several times. After each episode he has recovered and appeared to be normal until the next episode. We have never taken our dog to a veterinarian for this problem. We have simply given our dog a lot of tender loving care and massage. Each time he was back to normal within a few days.

A: Although strokes do occur in dogs, it is impossible to tell you whether or not this is your dog's problem without having much more information and actually seeing the dog.

The use of magnetic resonance imaging in dogs has led to the discovery that strokes might be more common than previously thought. Prior to the use of modern diagnostic techniques, such as MRI, many dogs exhibiting neurological abnormalities such as seizures or paralysis were diagnosed as having tumors and were either euthanized or treated for cancer.

Although MRI examinations of pets are usually very expensive, the procedure usually saves money in many situations because an accurate diagnosis is made earlier in the course of the disease. This, of course, allows prompt treatment of the actual problem. Unfortunately, without an accurate diagnosis, the animal does not receive effective treatment in a timely fashion and suffers needlessly while various treatments are tried.

Many large referral small animal hospitals in large cities and most veterinary teaching hospitals associated with colleges of veterinary medicine now have MRI equipment within their facilities or have ready access to such equipment at other health care facilities within their communities.

You should take your dog to your veterinarian for a complete physical examination and recommendations regarding his care as he continues to get older. Your veterinarian might refer your dog to a neurologist at a referral veterinary hospital.

Q: At this time of year when we decorate our home for the holidays, I really worry about our dog biting an extension cord. My husband enjoys holiday lights and has extension cords running everywhere inside and outside of our house. What should we do if we find our dog biting an extension cord?

A: Given the greatly increased use of extension cords during the holiday season, it is surprising that more pets are not harmed by chewing on them. Mild shocks and electrical burns on the tongue, mouth and lips are the most commonly seen injuries due to chewing on electrical cords. Fortunately, most of these injuries heal quickly without treatment.

If you find your dog chewing on an extension cord, you should disconnect it at the wall immediately. Trying to pull your dog from the cord while still electrified might result in you receiving a severe shock. Any dog not recovering immediately from an electrical shock should be taken to a veterinarian as soon as possible.

Send an e-mail or write to Pets, P.O. Box 120190, San Diego, CA 92112-0190. Only questions of general interest will be answered in this column.

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