

Strokes in Dogs

Do dogs have strokes?

"Strokes" or *cerebral vascular accidents* (CVA) are rare in dogs. A stroke is defined as a sudden interruption in blood supply to any part of the brain.

What causes a stroke?

Anything that can block an artery supplying the brain can cause a stroke. Some common causes include a blood clot such as a *thrombus* or *embolus* that lodges in a cerebral blood vessel. This is also known as a *thromboembolism* or an *embolism*. Cerebral bleeding from trauma or as a result of *thrombocytopenia* or low blood platelet count (see our separate handout on this topic) can also cause strokes. The cause of most strokes is unknown.

At what age are dog most at risk for having a stroke?

Most strokes occur in dogs over three years old, but young dogs may also be victims.

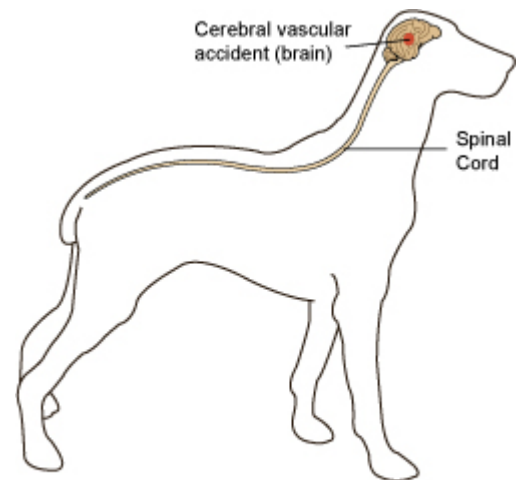
What are the signs of a stroke?

"Signs of a stroke are variable depending on the region or regions of the brain affected, and the degree and duration of blood and oxygen deprivation."

Signs of a stroke are variable depending on the region or regions of the brain affected, and the degree and duration of blood and oxygen deprivation. There may be sudden collapse or simply disorientation. A calm, relaxed dog may become vicious and vice versa. There may be loss of bladder and bowel habits, and loss of owner recognition. Any abrupt change in a dog's behavior is reason to have it examined by a veterinarian as soon as possible.

How is a stroke diagnosed?

Because many other conditions can have some of the same clinical signs, diagnosing a stroke may be a case of ruling out other possibilities. This often requires extensive tests. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is the ideal diagnostic test for diagnosing a stroke and its consequences in the brain.



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What is the treatment?

Treatment is quite complex and there is no guarantee of complete success.

What is the prognosis?

Some dogs will recover most of their motor functions and movement, but the behavioral changes may be more difficult to correct. Your veterinarian will help you assess progress and plan remedial action.

This client information sheet is based on material written by: Ernest Ward, DVM

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