

Epilepsy in dogs and cats

Homeopathy has a major role to play, writes *John Saxton*

The first problem to overcome in treating epilepsy is the fact that we are dealing with a condition that, in most cases, has very violent symptoms. The salivation, muscular spasms, sometimes involuntary howling that can occur, together with the incoordination of the recovery period, produce an understandable state of revulsion in many owners, compounded by a feeling of helplessness, especially when they witness it for the first time.



All photos courtesy of Francis Hunter

Long-term use of conventional drugs to control epilepsy can pose a strain on the liver

This has two consequences with regard to treatment. The first is that there can be an undue concentration on the presenting symptom rather than on the whole picture, and an undue emphasis in treatment on preventing further fits at any price.

Hahnemann laid great stress on the fact that disease can only be cured "if the physician clearly perceives what has to be cured... in each individual case of disease", and this applies to epilepsy just as much as to any other condition. True epilepsy is not an acute condition but is part of a chronic disease pattern, in many instances what Hahnemann referred to as a "one-sided disease". The really successful approach to its treatment is constitutional.

The second consequence is that accurate observation and reporting of the exact symptoms of a fit can be difficult. In one sense this is not as important as it may seem, as many of the features are local or common symptoms, but useful information can be obtained from this area of the picture.

Another factor affecting the disease picture is that many cases that present for homeopathic treatment are already receiving conventional anticonvulsant drugs. These may be failing to control the situation adequately and/ or there may be concerns over the side effects of their long-term use. One of the commonest drugs used is phenobarbitone and one of the other standard medications, Mysoline, is broken down in the body into barbiturate. Long-term use of these agents can pose a strain on the liver. In addition, from

the homeopathic point of view, this approach represents a degree of suppression of the case, with all the problems that that implies. However, in spite of this it cannot be stressed too strongly that such treatments must not be withdrawn suddenly, and any changes must take place under veterinary supervision. However homeopathy right from the start gives the best chance of a cure.

More cases of epilepsy are seen in dogs than in cats. Cats, unlike dogs, are a species that cannot synthesise the amino acid Taurine and hence care is taken to add it to their diet. One of the effects of Taurine in the body is as a controller of nervous impulses, and supplementing the diet of dogs to give higher levels can raise the threshold at which fits are triggered. Although not homeopathic, its use can be beneficial in the overall management of a case. Other ways of reducing the susceptibility to fits involves the use of herbal preparations, which can be helpful on occasions.

In some ways the cases where there is complete control of the fits by conventional medication are the most difficult. The picture is distorted and also the assessment of progress following a remedy is extremely difficult. Other changes in the body, usually behavioural, may give an

indication of some action by the remedy, but a reduction of the medication is often the only way of ascertaining any beneficial effect. In contrast those cases where there are still some fits occurring do offer a yardstick by which to judge progress.

Because we are dealing with a chronic disease, often treatment will throw up symptoms in other areas as the whole case is revealed. The major systems that are associated are the skin and the bowels, and there may be a "see-saw" between the symptoms.

The question of potency is an important consideration when prescribing the constitutional remedy. This is one of those conditions where the last thing we want is an aggravation! Hence caution is advisable and more moderate potencies are often initially employed, even in those cases where the indications for a particular remedy are strong. Of course in any acute episode where a remedy is being used to control a fit then high potencies are very

useful, as there is a high-energy output from the condition at that time.

The causes of epilepsy are many and it would not be appropriate here to consider all the factors that can possibly be linked, but one in particular is worthy of mention. That is vaccination. It is well documented that vaccinations, both primary and boosters, can on occasion produce convulsions. No animal with a history of convulsions, from whatever cause, should be given a vaccination without very good reason. Silica, having both convulsions and "ailments from vaccination" in its picture is extremely useful here.

Homeopathic treatment falls into two types. One is the full constitutional approach, aimed at obtaining a complete cure as this offers the best hope of success. Sometimes an "acute" remedy is used in addition. The other involves a compromise with the use of both homeopathic and conventional medications. The aim here is to use homeopathy to reduce the dependence on heavy medication, thereby

increasing the safety margins and improving the quality of life for the patient.

Case histories

Coco was a four-year-old golden retriever. She had had several fits over the previous three years, but these had been fairly mild and "very occasional", with a quick recovery. No conventional treatment had been given as the fits were mild and infrequent. However, the latest two fits had been more severe and frequent, and although apparently recovered she now appeared "not quite her usual self".

The fits had lasted about five minutes. There was no incontinence or howling, just a general spasm of the whole body with the head thrown back over the right shoulder. She had been vaccinated regularly with no apparent ill effects and there were no other health problems, only a behavioural inconvenience. Coco had lived with three other neutered bitches all her life and was friendly towards them. However, she would frequently mount any one of them, and if they protested run off and hide.

Originally her owner had planned to breed with her and so she was not neutered as a puppy. Her seasons had been regular but abnormally mild. Neutered at around 2½ years of age did nothing to change the sexual behaviour. She was wary of other dogs and if approached would initially "freeze" and escape at the first opportunity. If she finally got to know another dog she was friendly and playful. Her appetite was steady, preferring dry food, and not drinking as much as her companions. She liked cuddles from the owner. She was tolerant of heat but



Commercially prepared cat food is high in the amino acid Taurine which helps to suppress fits



More cases of epilepsy are seen in dogs than in cats

was happy to let others be near the fire.

She was given Pulsatilla 200c for three days, with Cicuta virosa M in case of an attack. She was re-presented two months later having had a mild fit. The Cicuta had not been given. The owner reported she was "more like her old self". Pulsatilla 200c was repeated. She has had no more fits and is now more confident with other dogs.

Zeberdee was a seven-year-old sheltie, an epileptic for three years. There was no known family history of epilepsy. The first fit had occurred within 24 hours of a booster vaccination. His only other health problem was chronic eczema and he had had kennel cough. He was on a high dose of phenobarbitone four times daily but the fits still occurred every three weeks. During them he would hyperventilate, be on his side with legs thrashing about in an incoordinated manner, salivate profusely, and pass urine. There was usually one scream before the fit. All but the last fit had occurred at night. He recovered in about an hour and was then ravenously hungry, being very sensitive to noise during that time. His owner had given Bufo 30c on two occasions and this had increased the intervals to five and eight weeks respectively, but he had now reverted to his three weekly pattern.

He was described as friendly to dogs and ladies but wary of men. He liked to play but disliked being cuddled. He was frightened of thunder, fireworks, and very wary in a crowd. He disliked the fire and preferred to be outside in all weathers, but would lie in the sun. His appetite was always good, his



thirst normal, and he did not suffer from flatulence.

Treatment was started with a combined vaccine nosode

30c, for four days. This was followed by Lycopodium 200c for two days. There were then two mild fits, each lasting about one minute, and each six weeks apart. He was reported as being more confident with men but otherwise unchanged. Lycopodium 200 was repeated. There were no more fits for five months, then one violent one daily for three days. Hyoscyamus 30c stopped the sequence and Lycopodium M was given for one day. There have now been no fits for over a year and his medication has been withdrawn. His eczema has also improved.



John Saxton
BVetMed
MRCVS
VetFFHom
qualified in 1964
and five years
later started his
own practice in
Leeds,
concentrating on
the small animal
side. He became
interested in
homeopathy in
the late 1970s
and was awarded
his Fellowship in
1996. He teaches
regularly in the
UK and
examines in
veterinary
homeopathy for
the Faculty of
Homeopathy.

Some of the most useful remedies in the epileptic situation

Aconite

Useful for both attendant and patient! The sudden onset fits the picture, and fear is sometimes seen just prior to the fit.

Belladonna

Another remedy where suddenness is a feature, together with the violence of the convulsions. There is great sensitivity during the fit, and the slightest external stimulus will keep it going. The attack usually involves a single fit rather than a cluster. As the acute of Calc carb, it is often of use where that is the indicated constitutional remedy.

Bufo

This has the reputation of the keynote of fits occurring during sleep. In actual fact the link is to night and sleep combined. The other feature is worse in a warm room. There is often a howl at the start of the fit.

Cicuta virosa

A distinctive feature here is that during the spasms the head is thrown back and to the side, so that the muzzle rests on the shoulder blade facing towards the tail.

Cocculus

A very useful remedy, its connection with vertigo gives it its place in this context.

Hyoscyamus

Related to Belladonna and Stramonium, this is also an excellent "local" remedy. Its picture is characterised by excessive movements of the face, both prior to a fit and at other times.

Kali brom

As Potassium bromide this is used as a conventional anti-convulsant, and it is also employed as a homeopathic remedy. The timing of the fits is often linked to oestrus, and there is marked excitement before they start.

Nux vom

Together with Ignatia the main ingredient is strychnine. These two, together with the remedy Strychninum have a role to play.