

# The Surprising Connection between Collars & Seizures

Karen Becker, DVM

## Cervical Disk and Neck Problems

Cervical subluxation can cause seizures, and this is something many pet owners don't realize. I see this type of seizure a lot in dogs that are *tied up* outside or who are walked with *retractable leashes*. They run to the length of their lead when chasing after an animal and, when the lead snaps back against the neck, it causes a high cervical traumatic injury of either the C1 vertebrae (the atlas) or C2 (the axis). The C1 is the first cervical vertebrae in animals and articulates with the brain stem. When there is increased cerebrospinal fluid pressure in the brain stem, it can lead to a seizure.

It is strongly recommended that you harness your pet not only for walks, but also if he's ever chained outside. It's important that your pet is not able to increase pressure on the neck, because high cervical subluxations and other chiropractic issues in the neck can cause an increased likelihood of seizures.

## Collar Strain

One type of injury I often see are cervical disk and neck problems resulting from collar strain. Hopefully, you've trained (or are training) your dog to walk beside you and heel on his leash. But even the most well-trained dog will have his moments when he

jumps suddenly forward, causing his collar to pull tightly against his neck--It might be a squirrel that hops across his path, or the sight of another dog, or a person he's

excited to greet--As your dog lunges in the direction of the excitement, he pulls all the slack out of the leash and applies a great deal of pressure via his collar to his neck and cervical area. This pressure can result in an injury to your dog's cervical disk or other problems with his neck.

Symptoms can include a hesitance to move or lower his neck to eat or drink, and painful crying out when his head or neck area is touched. Occasionally there can be lameness in a front leg with this type of injury. If your dog hasn't been outside for a good walk in a while, he's even more apt to pull quite a bit on his leash the next time you take him out. This will create the type of stress on his neck you want to avoid, so start with a bit of retraining of good leash behavior before you take your pup too far from his home base.

## How to Eliminate the Risk of Crippling Neck Injuries

Reinforce basic heel commands indoors before the exciting walk begins. Insist that your dog learn to walk comfortably next to you and at a pace that ensures slack on the lead at all times. Lead slack is crucial to preserving the health of your dog's neck and cervical disc throughout his life. *Repetitive yanking on the leash is not a viable form of training and only leads to additional neck trauma (caused by you).*

You also want to make sure you're using the right collar for your dog. If your pet habitually pulls on the leash, especially if he's a large breed, he can end up with *damage to his trachea*, including **collapsing trachea syndrome, or vertebral damage**. For example, a 90-pound dog with a choke collar who habitually strains at the leash is putting 90 pounds of pressure onto one inch of metal. That's a tremendous amount of stress to the dog's neck, and over time, injury is almost assured.

If your dog is a habitual puller and you're not able to improve his behavior on-leash, or while you work to improve his leash habits, I recommend that you switch to a harness, Gentle Leader type head halter, Easy Walk body harness, or another type of restraint suggested by your trainer. These alternate devices distribute your dog's body weight evenly across the restraint and alleviate all pressure on his neck. You'll need to help your dog build up his tolerance for the new type of restraint. You can do this with slow but consistent exposure through regular walks. I recommend a minimum of three walks a week for at least 20 minutes each. Practice using your new harness at home and indoors before the walk begins. More frequent walks for longer periods will only help your dog get used to his new restraint and improve his overall physical condition, so if you have or can make the time, take your dog for a good walk every day of the week if you can manage it.