



Seizure Dogs

Dogs specifically trained to help those with epilepsy can either be a *Seizure Alert Dog* or a *Seizure Response Dog* (note the difference that distinguishes them from each other).

- **Seizure Alert Dogs** – are dogs that sense their owners about to have a seizure and by exhibiting strange behaviour (e.g. running in circles) let the owner know this so they may prepare themselves. They will stay with their owner and perform seizure assist duties as well. They can be trained to go for help as well. Not all Seizure Alert Dogs are trained with a particular person with epilepsy. However once a match has been made between the dog and person, training for the team is together.
- **Seizure Assist Dogs** aka **Seizure Response Dogs** – gives a sense of security to their owner while having a seizure and perform medical assist duties if necessary. Someone certified in training assistance dogs can train this behaviour.

FAQ's

What do seizure dogs do?

A *seizure response dog* might be trained to bark when a child has a seizure so that family members know what is happening, or might lie next to someone having a seizure to keep them from harm, or might even be trained to activate some kind of pre-programmed device such as a pedal that rings an alarm or an emergency button on the wall. The dog may also be trained to go and get another family member.

A *seizure alert dog* might go through a number of actions that are different from its usual activities if it senses that its owner is going to have a seizure. Pawing, running in circles, coming and sitting close by, even barking directly at the person have been reported.

Can any dog do this?

Not all dogs have the temperament to be a service dog let alone have the innate ability to sense a seizure; what seems to be agreed on is the sensing of seizures is NOT a learned skill but is quite definitely an innate one that exists in only 10% of dogs. These dogs must undergo hundreds of hours of training before they are ready. Certified assistance dog trainers are able to produce only a few of these skilled animals every year.

How do people teach a dog to recognize a seizure in advance?

One research report describes developing this skill in some dogs by pairing them up with people who have frequent seizures and then giving a reward to the dog every time its human partner has a seizure. After a while, if the dog has the special sense, it will start looking for its reward *before* the seizure happens, thus warning the individual. Other dogs seem to develop this skill on their own, just by being in the company of an owner who has seizures.

How does a dog know that someone is going to have a seizure?

Nobody knows how the dog is able to detect an oncoming seizure. Some people have suggested that there may be a change in the owner's behaviour or scent before a seizure happens and that is what the dogs are responding to, but it's still a mystery.



How can someone get a seizure dog?

It depends what your goals are. If you are looking for a seizure response dog, you can discuss what you want the dog to do and work out a plan with a certified assistance dog trainer. Getting a dog with the special skill of recognizing seizures in advance is another matter. Any claims by trainers that they can produce this type of behaviour in a dog should be looked at very carefully, especially when the training is expensive. While some people report success, others have been disappointed. More research is needed to further learn what dogs can and cannot do, whether there are differences amongst breeds, and how best to develop this unique skill. At this time, getting a dog for companionship and seeing whether the skill develops may be the least expensive route to follow, remembering that the only research study that reported on the percentage of dogs with this ability estimated it to be no more than one in ten.

SEIZURE DOG CONTACTS

Special Skill Dogs of Canada www.dogguides.com 1-800-768-3030

The Lions Foundation trains Dog Guides to meet the needs of Canadians with hearing and other medical or physical disabilities. This includes Seizure Response Dogs.

U.S. Company Paws with a Cause: www.pawswithacause.org 1-800-253-7297

PAWS is the largest provider of Seizure Response Dogs. They train assistance dogs in the US for people with disabilities and provides lifetime team support.

WEBSITES

International Association of Assistance Dog Partners (IAADP) www.iaadp.org

A non-profit, cross-disability organization representing people partnered with guide, hearing and service dogs.

Assistance Dogs International www.adionline.org

A coalition of not for profit organizations that train and place assistance dogs

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You can join the BC Epilepsy Society as a member and receive all the program and service benefits.

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