

Making Dogs with Epilepsy Happier:
A Successful new treatment option
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Tennis Maynard considers himself a light sleeper, thanks to the noises of many puppies and adult dogs who have shared his life. When he awoke to a thump at the end of his bed several years ago, Tennis discovered his beloved Shar-Pei, Nu Gai (New Guy), having an epileptic seizure. Tennis says the experience was frightening, but he was optimistic that Nu Gai's behavior was simply a reaction to falling off the bed. Over the next few weeks, however, Nu Gai's seizures became more frequent, so Tennis scheduled an appointment with his veterinarian.

Although the diagnosis of epilepsy was devastating, Tennis found hope in a referral to a Morris Animal Foundation-funded study at The Ohio State University. Dr. Phil March and his colleagues were evaluating bromide as a potential new anti-epilepsy drug that they hoped would trigger fewer side effects than phenobarbital, the most commonly prescribed treatment. In the short term, phenobarbital can cause lethargy, increased appetite or thirst, and increased urination. These symptoms usually subside after the first few weeks. Dogs on phenobarbital generally take it for the rest of their lives.

According to Dr. March, "The big problem with phenobarbital is liver toxicity in the long term. It is often life threatening if it's not tended to right away." The liver doesn't metabolize bromide, though, which eliminates the risk of long-term liver or kidney toxicity. Bromide is already commonly used in concert with phenobarbital to treat canine epilepsy. But Dr. March and his colleagues are finding that the drug, when used alone, has an equal or better effect on dogs with this disease.

As a patient in Dr. March's study, Nu Gai started bromide treatment for epilepsy in February 2002. Since then, the treatment has reduced his frequent and violent seizures to just one mild seizure per month. That's a level Tennis finds more manageable – and much less frightening.

Susan Kelly's dog also found success with this treatment. Casper, a female Labrador Retriever, has been seizure-free since starting bromide therapy. Administering the oral bromide with Casper's food is easy, says Susan, and she's thrilled with the results.

"Casper's happy, and nothing has really changed as far as her personality goes, other than maybe that she's a tad more lazy," says Susan.

Epilepsy usually strikes dogs between one and five years old. There is no known cure, but genetics are believed to play a part. Epilepsy in dogs is usually characterized by seizures, typically involving whole body convulsions.

Dr. March says bromide therapy for dogs with epilepsy is available to veterinarians immediately and costs no more than phenobarbital treatments. If your dog has epilepsy, please share this article with your veterinarian. The details of the study will become public when Dr. March publishes his final results in a peer-reviewed journal within the

next few months.

“I want to thank Morris Animal Foundation for funding the study,” Tennis Maynard says.

“I think it has probably helped a lot of people. I know it made a big difference for Nu Gai and myself.” We hope it will help a lot of other people and their pets too.