



Navarro Small Animal Clinic

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Eclampsia in dogs

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Eclampsia is a severe drop in blood calcium levels in nursing mothers. This can occur when puppies are anywhere from one day old to five weeks of age. Nursing mothers are providing high levels of calcium to their offspring through their milk. This can deplete the mother's overall calcium stores leading to potentially fatal low levels of calcium. Mothers at higher risk include small breed dogs, dogs with a large litter of puppies, poor prenatal nutrition, and first time mothers. Chihuahuas, miniature pinchers, shih-tzus, and pomeranians are breeds that are predisposed to having hypocalcemia.

This condition is considered a medical emergency and you should contact your veterinarian immediately if you think your dog is experiencing eclampsia. Signs of eclampsia can start out very mild and include panting a lot, restlessness, and stiff body movements. These symptoms can progress quickly to tremors, weakness, stiffness of limbs, and convulsions. The muscle tremors and convulsions can result in a really high body temperature which can lead to organ failure if not treated quickly. Your veterinarian may elect to run bloodwork to check calcium, magnesium, and potassium levels, as well as organ function. If the calcium is found to be low then your pet can be treated with intravenous injections of calcium and potentially anti-seizure medication. If your pet has a high fever upon presentation then cool water soaks may be done to help reduce your pet's temperature. Alcohol may also be sprayed on her paw pads to help reduce her body temperature as well. Panting and sweating through the paw pads are a dog's way of keeping cool. If treatment is done rapidly then the dog usually does fairly well, however delayed treatment can lead to serious side effects and potentially death. Oral calcium supplements are typically sent home and the puppies are weaned immediately to prevent further depletion of calcium stores and avoid subsequent episodes of low calcium levels.

Prevention is the best way to avoid eclampsia in pregnant dogs. The easiest way to prevent low calcium levels is to feed a high-quality diet formulated for pregnant or nursing mothers. These diets are well balanced and rich in essential vitamins and minerals. Once a dog experiences eclampsia they are more likely to experience it again with subsequent litters.