

## Seizure alert and response dogs

Many people with epilepsy are unable to control their seizures despite medication. This means having to live with the uncertainty of never knowing when their next seizure comes which can have an impact on a person's confidence, self-esteem, independence and ability to live an active and independent life. It also means an increased risk of injury.

### How can a seizure dog help?

Seizure dogs can alert their owner of a seizure to come. These specially trained dogs can provide a reliable warning prior to a seizure which can allow their owner to find a safe place and seek help.

Having a seizure dog can also help you live more independently allowing you to carry out day-to-day tasks, including leaving the house, having a shower, cooking and ironing which would previously have been dangerous.

These are further examples of what a seizure dog may be able to do:

- \* bark to alert a family member, friend or carer when a seizure starts
- \* lie or stand next to their owner to break a fall and possibly prevent injury
- \* press an alarm button to call for help
- \* help with recovery, ie walk them to a safe place
- \* open and close doors
- \* help remove any tight clothing which might be restrictive during a seizure, by tugging it off

Apart from practical help, seizure dogs can be a big source of comfort during what can be frightening and sometimes dangerous situations. They can also provide much needed

company and unconditional love, especially if the person lives on their own and may feel isolated and reluctant to go out because of uncontrolled seizures.

## **What is the difference between a seizure dog and a pet dog?**

A pet dog can, of course, often provide similar emotional support and some may instinctively react to a seizure and over time learn to alert their owners to a seizure to come. An untrained pet dog will, however, not be recognised as an assistance dog, and will usually not be allowed access to areas that are normally restricted to pet dogs, such as taxis, shops, banks, hotels, libraries, pubs, and restaurants.

## **How can I get a seizure alert dog?**

Assistance Dogs UK [www.assistedogs.org.uk](http://www.assistedogs.org.uk) is an umbrella body of eight charities who train assistance dogs to a high standard. Only one of these member charities can train seizure alert and response dogs. Support Dogs UK provides and trains seizure dogs that will receive an official assistance dog jacket.

### **Support Dogs UK**

Support Dogs UK [www.supportdogs.uk](http://www.supportdogs.uk) are based in Sheffield and will train and match up a suitable seizure dog with a potential owner. They do not train pet dogs. Anyone in the UK, including Scotland, can apply but there is a strict process in place to make sure you meet the criteria for a seizure alert dog. For example, you need to be over 16 and have at least 10 serious seizures per month.

You can request a seizure alert information pack online or contact them on 0114 261 7800.

If you feel you meet the criteria and wish to apply you can complete an online application form. If selected, this will involve attending an information day at the Support Dogs UK training centre in Sheffield. There is high demand for these trained dogs, and you may be

put on a waiting list or may not be accepted onto their training programme, even if you meet the criteria.

## **Commercial companies and independent trainers**

There are commercial companies who also train assistance dogs. If you go to any of these, you need to do your own careful research as these are not members of Assistance Dogs UK, and there is no guarantee that dogs are trained to the same high standards. You may be paying a lot of money for an assistance dog which turns out to be unsuitable.

You can of course also go to an independent dog trainer who may be able to help with training your pet dog to recognise and positively respond to seizures. This will not necessarily turn your dog into an assistance dog allowing access to restricted areas. Having a professionally trained pet dog can, however, still make a positive difference to your life and how you manage your epilepsy.

## **And finally ...**

Owning a dog can of course have other benefits. Regular exercise is good for all of us as it improves our overall wellbeing, but there is some anecdotal evidence that regular exercise such as walking your dog can sometimes improve seizure control.

If you want to find out more about seizure dogs or epilepsy in general, please contact our helpline on 0808 800 2200.