

Narcolepsy in Dobermans

courtesy of Animal Info Publications

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What is narcolepsy and what are the symptoms?

Narcolepsy is a generically inherited problem that is characterised by the dog appearing to fall asleep right in their tracks. The dog loses control of it's hind legs and may collapse into a totally paralysed state. Yet they are aware of their surroundings and may even track movement with their eyes. It may last from a few seconds to a couple of minutes and does not cause any residual grogginess or harmful after effects. It is totally different to epilepsy or seizures - there is no muscle rigidity or spasms and the dog remains conscious of it's surroundings. A dog in a narcolepsy state simply has no muscle tone whatsoever.



Narcolepsy generally appears between 4 weeks to 6 months of age. Attacks can be triggered by intense pleasure and excitement and frequency can vary tremendously. Frequency of attacks does usually reduce with increased age but the dog will never be totally free of the condition. There is no real health risks or dangers caused by narcolepsy attacks unless the dog collapses during a dangerous situation (crossing the road...). Many attacks will go unobserved by the owners because of the lack of lasting effects.

Incidence in Dobermans

Low

What is the treatment?

The condition can be treated with anti-depressants and various stimulants but the side effect of these treatments is often hyperactivity so in most cases owners elect not to treat and to simply observe and keep their dog in safe conditions.

How can I avoid buying a Doberman with narcolepsy?

The gene can be identified in breeding stock with a DNA-based test. This test will identify genetically clear or normal dogs (they will never develop the disease), carrier dogs (they carry one disease gene but will never develop the disease) affected dogs (they will develop the disease). This test was developed by Optigen, is called the Optigen NARC test and can be applied to Dachshunds, Doberman pinschers and Labrador Retrievers.

If one or both parents are proven normal or clear, they will not produce affected pups. However all other matings have the risk of producing narcolepsy affected pups. You can have your pup tested for the NARC gene as soon as they are able to withstand a small blood collection. If your breeder hasn't tested their dogs you can arrange this test with your veterinarian.

Testing Resources

In most cases, your veterinarian should be able to advise you on how to have your dog tested. However the following information will be useful if you wish more information or want to arrange testing yourself.