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Seizure-Alert Dogs

"Seizure-alert dogs, save lives". This is what the media would like the general public to believe, and while it makes for a great headline, it also makes for a grave misrepresentation of the truth. The truth is, seizure dogs can not be trained to "alert" a person of an oncoming seizure. Therefore, a seizure dog may be useful in assisting a person during or after a seizure, but is not guaranteed to be able to "alert" a person of an oncoming seizure.

Seizure-alert dogs, as implied by their name, are dogs that can sense and notify their human companions of an oncoming seizure. This alerting behavior has been reported to occur several seconds to 45 minutes or more before the onset of the seizure. The dog does this by exhibiting marked changes in behavior, including close eye contact, circling, pawing, barking etc.

- ◆ SEIZURE DOG or SEIZURE ASSIST DOG - assist their human companions before a seizure occurs. These dogs are trained to assist the human companion, but may or may not alert.
- ◆ SEIZURE-ALERT, RESPONSE or ASSIST DOG - assist during and after a seizure. These dogs can cue in on minute behavioral differences. Seizure-assist dogs can be trained to stay close to their companions for the duration of the seizure as well as fetch medications, a telephone or caretaker.
- ◆ These dogs remained close to their human companions, either standing or lying alongside them, sometimes licking the person's face or hands during and immediately after the seizure.
- ◆ For some people a seizure-alert dog can really make a difference. Generally, the person needs to have the cognitive ability to notice that the dog is trying to alert them and respond accordingly. Sometimes the dog may be alerting in more subtle ways other than barking or pawing, and the person needs to be able to pick-up on that.
- ◆ Ensuring success of a seizure dog must also include a lot of playtime and exercise since these activities help in keeping the dog's stress level down.
- ◆ Currently, there are about 120 service dog training organizations in the United States. Fewer than 20 of these organizations work with seizure-assist dogs.
- ◆ Training of service dogs can take 6 months to 2 years depending on the availability of appropriate dogs and the tasks they are being taught.