

## Can a cat bite its tongue during a seizure?

**CatChannel veterinary expert, Arnold Plotnick, DVM, provides advice about epilepsy in cats.**

*By Arnold Plotnick, DVM*

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**Q:** I have a 3-year-old cat that was recently diagnosed with idiopathic epilepsy. I understood from our veterinarian that he could not "swallow his tongue" during a grand mal seizure. We came home last Friday and found that he had bitten his tongue and his lower left incisor had gone all the way through so that the tongue was stuck on it all the way to the bottom of the tooth. Ouch!

We took him to the vet, of course, and once his tongue was extricated from the tooth, I could see that the bite mark was about half way back on the tongue. Could this have been caused by anything other than a seizure, such as getting overbalanced jumping up on his perch while running away from his littermate and hitting his chin on the windowsill?

If cats indeed can bite their tongues during a seizure, is there anything we can do to prevent this if we are present during the seizure? We have towels scattered throughout the house to place under his head to protect it, but I have no idea what to do about the tongue biting.

**A:** I'm sorry to hear about your cat's epilepsy. I think the alternate scenario you've described to possibly explain the bite mark on the tongue is unlikely. The bite probably occurred during a seizure. Sadly, some cats do bite themselves during a seizure. Oddly enough, I just saw a cat during an appointment that had a seizure the night before and had bitten his paw during the seizure. He presented it to me because he was limping on the foot that he had bitten.

While there is nothing you can do to prevent cats from biting themselves during a seizure, there are medications that can decrease the frequency and severity of the seizures. You didn't say if your cat was receiving anticonvulsant therapy or not. If not, you should consider this treatment.

There are some general guidelines regarding anticonvulsant therapy. I usually consider therapy if the cat is having seizures more than once a month, if the cat has more than one seizure on any given day or if the seizures are particularly violent.

You didn't mention how frequent the seizures were, but the fact that your cat injured himself during this last seizure would be enough for me to start your cat on Phenobarbital, my initial anticonvulsant of choice. Discuss this with your veterinarian. Once your cat starts taking Phenobarbital, it needs to be given twice daily for the rest of his life. Blood levels of the drug need to be monitored regularly, and dosages adjusted accordingly. Good luck.