

# HEADS UP FOR VETS!

## EPILEPSY vs PNES

### WHAT IS EPILEPSY?

Epilepsy is a disorder in which brain cells (neurons) misfire producing sudden, unpredictable, excessive pulses of electrical energy in the brain which cause seizures to happen. Seizures can create a change in behavior, movement or sensation.

### WHAT IS PNES?

Psychogenic Non-Epileptic Seizures (PNES) are a physical response to a psychological condition usually caused by stress or trauma. These non-epileptic episodes can look like epileptic seizures but are not caused by abnormal electrical activity in the brain.

### WHAT CAUSES PNES?

PNES is most often related to stress or emotional trauma. While we do not fully understand how or why they happen, these episodes are a common way for the conscious brain to react to unconscious or unresolved issues from the past or the present. Although there are many different reasons for each individual, we know that people do not intentionally produce these episodes. They can be triggered by a stressful event or can even occur in a perfectly calm and normal situation.

### HOW IS PNES DIAGNOSED?

The definitive test for PNES is a Video EEG (electroencephalogram), where the doctors can simultaneously monitor a patient's behavior and brain wave pattern. This allows the doctor to determine if the behavior (seizure) the patient is experiencing is caused by abnormal electrical activity in the brain (epileptic seizure) or not (PNES).

### HOW IS PNES TREATED?

Although many people diagnosed with PNES find it initially hard to comprehend, most patients experience symptom reduction after they fully understand the diagnosis and begin counseling services.

### KEY MESSAGES...

- It is extremely important that individuals diagnosed with PNES participate in behavioral health treatment, such as counseling and psychotherapy.
- It is equally important for patients and caretakers to understand that a person who is diagnosed with epileptic seizures can also experience PNES.
- Developing an open line of communication between the patient, caregivers and the medical team is the best medicine to assure proper diagnosis and treatment.

