

Do's and Don'ts in Pet First Aid

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This information is meant to prepare the pet owner for a variety of situations that may require emergency care. This is not meant to take the place of veterinary care. **Please consult your veterinarian regarding your pet in case of emergency.** It is also a good idea to discuss first aid care with your veterinarian regarding any specific needs your pet may have. The best action in any emergency is to be well prepared.

THE FIRST AID KIT

I recommend keeping your pet's first aid kit in a watertight container. Or if you choose to use a duffle bag type container keep medical records and other paper items in zip lock type bags for protection.

Items specific for your pet:

- Medical records including vaccine records
- Picture of pet
- Veterinary contact (regular veterinarian, emergency veterinarian)
- Pet poison control contact information
- A few days supply of medications your pet requires on a regular basis

General items:

- Rubber gloves
 - Bottled water
 - Instant ice pack
 - Scissors
 - Tweezers
 - Flashlight
 - Thermometer (quick read recommended)
 - Eye wash
 - Adhesive tape
 - Gauze
 - Telfa pads
 - Cleaning wipes
 - Extra leash
 - Pillow case (makes a handy transport for cats in quick situations)
 - Antibiotic ointment
 - Benadryl
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SPECIFIC CONDITIONS

Heat stroke

Heat stroke occurs when a dog (or cat) loses its ability to regulate its body temperature. A normal temperature is between 100-102.5 ° F. Animals primarily regulate their body temperature through respiration (panting). Once the body's temperature goes above 105° F, it can be very difficult to regulate the temperature. Once the temperature goes above 108° F, organ damage can occur.

Contributors to heat stroke: Warmer temperatures with less than ideal ventilation, obesity, overexertion, lack of water. Certain breeds are predisposed (brachycephalics - i.e. pugs, bulldogs, etc.) and once your pet has suffered heat stroke the chances are increased it will happen again.

Signs of heat stroke: Muddy pink gums (instead of bright pink), heavy panting with occasional frothing at the mouth, disorientation, increased heart rate. I often see heat stroke in the spring as the warm days can sneak up on you. Most folks seem aware in the summer not to leave their pets in the car or running around out doors too long.

What to do: Remove the pet from the heat source if possible. Increase ventilation (fan) and apply cool water or a cool towel compress. Do not apply ice, this causes blood vessels to constrict and lessens the body's ability to dissipate the heat. Reapply the cool towels frequently. Offer but do not force water to your pet to drink water. **Get your pet to the veterinarian quickly.**

Seizures

Observing a seizure can be a very frightening experience for many people. Seizures occur when there is abnormal electrical activity in the brain causing muscles to contract and spasm involuntarily. There are many causes of seizures from epilepsy to low blood sugar.

Signs of seizure: When an animal is having a generalized seizure (grand mal) they typically fall to the ground, paddle their legs (which can be very vigorous), their eyes are usually open and they may urinate and defecate during the seizure. Fortunately seizures are not painful to the animal and they are unaware they are having them. After the seizure the pet may seem disoriented and not themselves.

What to do: Do not try to stop the seizure or move the animal unless they are in danger of hurting themselves (i.e. near a stair case). Do not offer them water or try to hold them down. Monitor the time they are in a seizure, usually 2 – 3 minutes or less. After the seizure, calmly try

to reassure the pet. However, it may take the pet a bit to recognize you and come around so do not force this issue. Contact your veterinarian and inform them of what happened.

When is the seizure an emergency? If you think the seizure was caused by a toxic substance, if your pet is having difficulty breathing or if the seizure lasts more than 5 minutes or is having repetitive seizures in the same day.

Trauma

Trauma is a very broad category with a multitude of possible scenarios. I will try to break down the more common occurrences and what to do for each one.

Some tips for handling an injured pet:

- **Assume that they may try to bite or scratch you.** Even the friendliest pet when hurt, scared or otherwise traumatized may act out of character. So many times people try to assist an injured pet and wind up in the emergency room themselves. So above all, do not make a situation worse by getting yourself injured.
- **When coming upon an injured pet, take a look from a distance.** Are they conscious, are they visibly bleeding? Are they struggling to breathe or move? Approach slowly; call their name if you know it. If need be now is the time to apply a muzzle to the dog or have a towel ready to place around their head to help restrain. Only move the animal at this point if you are in harms way. Otherwise take a moment to assess the situation.
- **Perform a gentle and quick examination.** Look from head to toe for anything that looks amiss: bleeding, lacerations, broken bones.

Active bleeding: Apply pressure with gauze, towel anything clean that allows you to cover the bleeding area. Hold steady pressure (no peeking) for 5 minutes. Then recheck. Many people want to apply tourniquets to limbs. Without proper training these often will cause more harm than good.

Lacerations: Wash area with water to remove obvious debris. Do not explore the lacerations or puncture wounds with your fingers or any other objects. You may introduce material into the wound. Gently bandage if possible afterwards.

Fractures (broken bones): Depending on where the break is will dictate what you need to do.

- **Breaks of the big bones (femur [thigh bone] and humerus [upper arm bone])** are difficult to splint. The purpose of a splint is to limit the movement at the site of the break. Because these bones are close to the core body you frequently cannot immobilize that area. You are

better off limiting the pet's entire movement and transporting to the veterinarian on or in a secure device (crate, box etc). This is especially true for cats.

- **Fractures of other bones (radius, lower arm bone or tibia lower leg bone)** can be splinted or bandaged for travel. First thing is to make sure you know exactly what is broken, it can be deceiving. Then using rolled cotton, a towel or even newspaper you can wrap the limb (one joint above and one joint below) and secure with tape. If there are open wounds at the break site make sure they are covered with a clean non-sticky material. The splint or bandage should apply even pressure around the limb as much as possible. It is also important that the bandage not be too tight. It should be snug but not tight. Keeping two toes out will allow you to see if swelling is starting to occur. Swollen toes indicate that the bandage is probably too tight and needs to be removed.

CPR (Cardio pulmonary resuscitation) may be required In the event of serious injury. The success rate with CPR is often low but is worth the effort in an emergency situation.

- **First check your pet for a heartbeat.** Place your hand or your ear to your animal's chest wall (left side preferably) just behind their front leg near the elbow. It is best to try this some time before your pet is injured so that you are comfortable with the technique. Checking for a pulse is another method to assess heart rate. Palpating for a pulse either at the femoral artery (inside the rear leg, up towards the body wall in the middle of the limb) or the carotid artery which is on the neck just to the side of midline.
- **If your pet does not have a heartbeat, check for breathing.** Watch to see if the chest wall rises up and down.

Performing CPR Have your pet on a level surface.

- **Breathing** Check the mouth (again carefully do not get bitten) for any obstructions. Close the pet's mouth and breathe directly into their nose. Watch to see the chest rise. If it does not rise recheck for any visible obstruction and try again. Once you can see the chest fall and rise you want to breathe for your pet one breath every 5 seconds or so.
 - **Compressions** Lay your pet down on their right side. One hand under the pet and your dominant hand on top of the chest behind the front arm. Push down approximately 1 inch for small to medium dogs and 2 inches for larger dogs. Compress the chest approximately 100 times per minute.
 - **Alternate breathing with compressions**
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Bloat (Gastric Dilatation/Volvulus)

Gastric dilatation/volvulus (bloat) is a disorder in which the stomach accumulates gas but is unable to pass it. As the stomach distends with gas it puts pressure on the circulatory system as well as other structures in the abdomen. In volvulus, the stomach 'twists' on its axis. It is a disorder more commonly seen in large breed, deep-chested dogs. But do not forget that the dachshund and the basset hound are considered deep-chested breeds.

Signs of bloat: Abdominal distention, trying (usually unsuccessfully) to vomit, retching and pain.

What to do: The best course of action is to **get to your veterinarian or emergency provider ASAP**. This is truly an emergency. Call them ahead of time to prepare them (there are things they will want to get ready for your arrival) and for any specific instructions.

Choking

Signs of choking: Pawing at the mouth, blue coloration to the tongue, gums and lips and more likely than not a pet that is agitated and then possibly unconscious.

What to do: If your pet can breathe it might be best to get them to a veterinarian ASAP. If you are uncertain if your pet can or is breathing you must carefully, and I cannot stress the word carefully enough, examine your pet's mouth and oral cavity. If you can see a foreign object attempt to remove it. If you do not see anything you may take a sweep with your finger to see if you can feel something to remove.

Heimlich maneuver: You can place your hands on both sides of the pet's ribs. You want to administer quick firm pressure upwards. Otherwise you can lay your pet on its side and give a palm strike to their rib cage (3-4 times with an open hand). Repeat if needed.

Poisoning

There are many items around a house that can contribute to pet poisonings. Chocolate, grapes, raisins, xylitol products (gum, candy), antifreeze and rodenticides are all worth mentioning. Also remember when using flea and tick products to follow the directions closely. Many flea products safe for dogs can be lethal to a cat.

The best offense with poisonings is to limit your pet's access to them. Remember that rodenticides (rat poisons) are meant to lure an animal to eat them. Your dog or cat will be tempted as well. Many pet medications are now flavored tablets and meant to be tasty treat. These can pose a risk to your pet if they gain access to the container.

If you suspect your pet has been poisoned obtain as much information about the product as possible. Brand name, generic name, total amount in container, amount missing are some of the questions you will be asked. I suggest contacting your veterinarian or pet poison control immediately to be guided in what to do next.

- **24-hour ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center hotline: 1-888-426-4435.** There is a \$60 consultation fee for this service.

The ASPCA website at www.aspca.org/pet-care/poison-control/ also offers tips on toxic and non-toxic plants, snake bite safety/prevention, and creating a poison-safe home.

I do not recommend inducing vomiting or giving any product after a suspected poisoning unless you have been instructed to do so by a veterinarian familiar with the case. Never induce vomiting if the pet is lethargic, seizing or unconscious. Also do not induce vomiting if they have ingested a caustic substance such as an acid or an alkali.

If you need to induce vomiting:

- **Hydrogen peroxide:** 1 tsp per 5-10 lb of body weight given orally to induce vomiting.
- **Activated charcoal:** 1 tablet per 2 tsp of water to dissolve. Then administer orally 1 tsp of the solution per 2lb of body weight. I recommend doing this outside as charcoal will stain carpeting.

Insect bites

Insect bites or stings are a common occurrence in the warmer months.

Signs your pet may have been bitten or stung: Acute crying or yelping with no visible reason. Depending on where your pet was bitten, they may limp or have a swollen area on them.

What to do: Inspect the area. If you can see a stinger, try to remove it with tweezers. Cold compress the area for 5-10 minutes and repeat one half hour later if necessary.

Check with your veterinarian to see if your pet may take Benadryl®. The dose is usually 1mg per 1 lb of body weight given orally. Most tablets available over the counter are 25mg, but be certain to check your tablets size. Benadryl may be given every 8 – 12 hours as needed.
