

First Aid for Your Pet

Prevention

The simplest way to avoid performing first aid on your pet is to prevent accidents and emergencies from occurring in the first place. Prevent an emergency situation before it occurs: be aware of any changes in your pet's health or behavior. If your pet exhibits any of the following signs, seek immediate veterinary attention.

- Keep your dog on a leash or under control, and keep your cat indoors.
- Keep poisons—such as rat and mouse poison or corrosive household cleaners—out of your home.
- Crate train your dog so he stays out of trouble when you're not home.
- Monitor your pet for signs of disease. If you notice any weight loss, lack of appetite, persistent coughing, pale gums, exercise intolerance or difficulty breathing, see your veterinarian. The sooner your veterinarian can diagnose the problem, the better your pet's prognosis.

Emergency Warning Signs

Prevent an emergency situation before it occurs: be aware of any changes in your pet's health or behavior. If your pet exhibits any of the following signs, seek immediate veterinary attention.

- Abnormal heart rate
- Collapse
- Coughing
- Difficulty breathing
- Dilated pupils
- Lethargy/weakness
- Loss of appetite
- Pain
- Pale gums
- Restlessness and panting
- Unproductive retching
- Vomiting

Please note that this list is not all-inclusive.

If your pet exhibits any changes in health or behavior, contact your veterinarian.

Stop. Assess. Act.

In the event of a pet emergency, remain calm. It's important that you keep a level head so that you can properly assess the situation and communicate clearly with your veterinarian.

1. Put safety first. Before rushing in to aid an injured pet, take a moment to ensure that it's safe for you to enter the area.
2. Check the ABCDs: Airway, Breathing, Circulation, Disability. Clear your pet's airway, check for breathing and a heartbeat and assess his level of injury.
3. Administer first aid. Control bleeding, flush burns, immobilize broken limbs, etc.

4. Get to a veterinary hospital ASAP. Program into your cell phone the numbers of your veterinarian, an emergency veterinarian and Pet Poison Helpline (855-289-0358). Call the veterinary hospital to alert them that you are on the way so they can be prepared.

The Vitals: Baseline Health Stats

Knowing what's normal for your dog or cat can help you determine if anything is out of the ordinary.

Small and Medium Dogs Pulse: 70-140 beats per minute

Respiratory rate: 15-30 breaths per minute

Large Dogs Pulse: 50-120 beats per minute

Respiratory rate: 15-30 breaths per minute

Cats Pulse: 140-200 beats per minute

Respiratory rate: 15-30 breaths per minute

How to Take Your Pet's Pulse

1. Find a watch with a second hand.

2. Find the pulse or heartbeat in one of two ways:

- Place two fingers inside your pet's thigh, near where the leg and body meet (dogs only).
- Place your hands on both sides of the chest cavity (just behind the elbows).

3. Count the beats for 15 seconds, then multiply by four. This gives you the number of beats per minute.

Note: It is very difficult to find a heart rate on cats. If you suspect that anything is wrong, seek immediate veterinary attention.

Pet First Aid Kit Essentials

Keep these items in a waterproof container, stored in an accessible location but out of your pet's reach.

- Veterinarian's contact information
- Emergency veterinarian's contact information
- Pet Poison Helpline contact information (855-289-0358)
- Gauze roll and gauze pads
- Medical tape
- Ruler or other rigid material for splint
- Scissors • Tweezers • Thermometer and sterile lubricant (KY® Jelly)
- Hydrogen peroxide (non-expired)
- Plastic gloves (non-latex)
- Towel or blanket
- Muzzle
- Elizabethan collar (also known as an "E-collar" or "cone")
- Triple antibiotic ointment (Neosporin®)
- Ophthalmic saline solution, with no other cleansers or soaps in it

Handling an Injured Pet

Carefully restrain injured pets—even the friendliest ones can bite or scratch when in pain. Never muzzle a dog if he is unconscious, has difficulty breathing, is vomiting or has a mouth injury. Never muzzle a cat; use an E-collar, then bundle in a towel and secure in a cat carrier immediately.

How to Use a Homemade Muzzle

You can gently restrain an injured dog using a homemade muzzle.

1. Use a bandage, men's tie, length of rag or other piece of long, narrow fabric.
2. Loop the fabric once around your dog's snout and tie it under his chin.
3. Loop the fabric around the snout two or three more times.
4. Pull the ends of the fabric from under the chin and tie securely behind the ears.

Transporting an Injured Pet

Create a makeshift stretcher by carefully sliding a flat, rigid surface (such as an ironing board or plastic children's sled) under your injured pet, keeping his back and neck as immobilized as possible. Secure your pet using towels, straps or gentle human restraint. Alternatively, move your pet onto a towel or blanket, which can be used as a hammock for transport; be sure to pull the corners taut in order to keep your pet as flat as possible.

Bleeding—External

First Aid:

1. Restrain your pet. Use a muzzle for dogs and an E-collar for cats.
2. Use clean gauze to apply direct pressure. Do not remove the initial gauze; add more clean gauze as needed to control bleeding.
3. If the wound continues to hemorrhage severely, use your hand to apply pressure between the wound and the heart. Do not apply a tourniquet without consulting a veterinarian.
4. Elevate the affected area.
5. Apply a tight bandage around the wound, using gauze and duct tape or white medical tape.
6. Go immediately to a veterinary hospital.

Bleeding—Internal

Signs:

- Coughing blood
- Pale, white gums
- Collapse
- Localized pain or swelling
- Weak or rapid pulse
- Elevated heart rate
- Vomiting
- Bleeding from nose, mouth, ears or rectum
- Blood in urine, feces or saliva

First Aid:

1. Keep your pet calm and quiet by wrapping him in a towel or blanket.
2. If your dog is affected, gently lift him into the car by picking him up around the legs, not the abdomen. If your cat is affected, place her in a carrier.
3. Go immediately to a veterinary hospital.

Broken Bones

Because broken bones are extremely painful, most animals instinctively avoid bearing weight on them. If you suspect that your pet has broken a bone, go immediately to a veterinary hospital; administering first aid at home can end up causing more pain or further injury to your pet.

Signs:

- Sudden pain and swelling
- Favoring a limb
- Bone visible under or through skin
- Limb held at an abnormal angle

First Aid:

1. Restrain your pet. Use a muzzle for dogs and an E-collar for cats.
2. Transfer dogs onto a homemade stretcher (see “Transporting an Injured Pet,” page 9); put cats into a carrier.
3. Go immediately to a veterinary hospital.

Burns—Chemical

Chemical burns are often caused by contact with household cleaning chemicals such as drain cleaners, pool chemicals and concentrated toilet or dishwashing cleaners.

Signs:

- Chemical odor
- Red, raw skin
- Pain and pawing at mouth
- Drooling or swallowing excessively

First Aid—Ingestion:

1. After safely removing the product from your pet’s reach, gather the container or substance to bring to the veterinary hospital or to describe to the veterinarian.
2. Call Pet Poison Helpline at 855-289-0358 for further immediate recommendations.*
3. If your dog ingested or chewed on a corrosive chemical, immediately rinse his mouth with tap water for 5-10 minutes. If your cat was affected, offer tasty liquid to flush her mouth, like canned tuna water or chicken broth.
4. Go immediately to a veterinary hospital.

First Aid—Skin Only:

1. Liberally flush the affected area with water for 5-10 minutes.
2. Safely gather the container or substance to bring to the veterinary hospital or to describe to the veterinarian.
3. Apply a generous amount of sterile lubricant (such as KY® Jelly).
4. Loosely cover the wound with gauze or a bandage.
5. Contact your veterinarian.

Burns—Heat

Heat burns can be caused by contact with fire, hot surfaces or hot liquids.

Signs:

- Singed fur
- Red skin
- Pain

First Aid:

1. Restrain your pet. Use a muzzle for dogs and an E-collar for cats.
2. Gently flush the area with tepid tap water for 5-10 minutes. Or, immerse the affected area in cool water (no ice) or apply a damp, cool washcloth.
3. Apply sterile lubricant (such as KY® Jelly) to the affected area.
4. Loosely cover the wound with gauze or a bandage.
5. Go immediately to a veterinary hospital.

Coughing and Choking

In general, if your pet is attempting to cough, don't interfere. If the coughing does not resolve in a few minutes or worsens, seek immediate veterinary attention. If you see your pet choking on something (such as a toy or piece of food), intervene immediately.

Signs of Coughing:

- Gagging
- Coughing
- Difficulty breathing
- "Coughing" up a hairball: Cats make this non-productive cough when they have severe lung disease (such as asthma or heartworm disease). While rare, be sure you know what signs to look for.

Seek Immediate Veterinary Help for:

- Blue gums
- Gasping
- Not breathing

First Aid-- Visible Obstruction:

1. Check for visible obstructions such as food, toys or vomit by carefully opening your pet's mouth. Place one hand over the muzzle, with your thumb and fingers behind the upper canine teeth. Using your other thumb, pull down on the lower jaw.
2. Attempt to safely clear the obstruction from your pet's mouth, or have someone assist you.

First Aid—No Visible Obstruction:

1. With your pet in the standing position, kneel or stand directly behind him.
2. Place your fist about an inch below your pet's sternum.
3. Give a quick, sharp thrust to expel the obstruction.
4. Go immediately to a veterinary hospital.

Electrocution

Electrocution or electrical burns often occur as the result of chewing on electrical cords and wires. This can cause electrical burns in the mouth as well as an atypical reaction in which fluid accumulates in the lungs.

Signs:

- Burns on tongue and in mouth
- Irregular heartbeat
- Difficulty breathing

First Aid:

1. Making sure the power is off, carefully remove your pet from the electrocution source.
2. Check if your pet is breathing and conscious. Gently lift the cheek to see if the gums are pink, and carefully open the jaws to check for burns on the tongue or mouth.
3. Do not put anything on the burn.
4. Keep your pet calm and quiet by wrapping him in a towel or blanket.
5. Go immediately to a veterinary hospital.

Eye Injuries**Signs:**

- Swelling
- Redness
- Discharge
- Tearing
- Pawing at the eye

- Rubbing the eye or face on the carpet
- Bulging eye

First Aid—Debris:

1. Wrap your pet in a towel or blanket for gentle restraint.
2. Flush the affected eye with saline solution for 5-10 minutes. If you wear contact lenses, be sure not to use any lens solutions that contain other chemicals or cleaners.
3. Seek veterinary care to rule out corneal ulcers.

First Aid—Laceration of Eyelid:

1. Wrap your pet in a towel or blanket for gentle restraint.
2. Use gauze to apply gentle, direct pressure to the eyelid.
3. Place dry, clean gauze over the eye and tape closed; do not put ointment or medication in the eye.
4. Seek veterinary care immediately.

First Aid—Laceration of Eyeball:

1. Wrap your pet in a towel or blanket for gentle restraint.
2. DO NOT flush or clean the eye.
3. Cover the eye with a paper cup and tape in place if possible; otherwise, do not touch!
4. Go immediately to a veterinary hospital.

First Aid—Protruding Object:

1. Wrap your pet in a towel or blanket for gentle restraint.
2. Do not attempt to remove the object.
3. Cover the eye with a paper cup and tape in place if possible; otherwise, do not touch!
4. Go immediately to a veterinary hospital.

No Heartbeat

Before starting chest compressions, be certain that there is no heartbeat. Performing chest compressions while the heart is still beating can cause extreme harm to your pet.

Signs:

- Unconscious
- Not breathing
- No heartbeat

Step 1: Confirm No Heartbeat

1. Open your pet's airway by gently extending his neck and clearing any obstructions.
2. Check for a heartbeat by placing your hands on both sides of your pet's chest, right behind the elbow/armpit area. Feel for a beat for 10 seconds.
3. If there is no heartbeat, begin chest compressions and mouth-to-muzzle breathing.

Step 2: Begin Chest Compressions

1. Carefully lay your pet on his right side on a hard surface such as an ironing board, which can also be used as a stretcher.
2. Interlock your fingers with both palms facing down to administer compressions. Give approximately one compression per second (60-100 beats per minute) for 30 seconds, being careful not to crack the ribs. Compress the chest by about 1/3 of its normal diameter.
 - If your pet weighs fewer than 30 lbs, administer compressions directly over his heart.
 - If your pet weighs more than 30 lbs, administer compressions on the widest part of his chest cavity.
3. Wrap both hands tightly around your pet's muzzle so no air can escape. Give five breaths of 2-3 seconds each by blowing directly and steadily into his nostrils.
4. Continue chest compressions and mouth to-muzzle breathing until your pet's heart starts beating on its own. Have someone drive you to a veterinarian while you perform CPR.
5. Go immediately to a veterinary hospital, calling ahead so that they're prepared for your arrival.

Not Breathing

If your pet is not breathing, it's important to act quickly—lack of oxygen can cause brain damage after only a few minutes.

Step 1:

Check for Signs of Breathing Check for breathing in one of three ways:

1. Place your ear next to your pet's nose and mouth and listen for breathing.
2. Place your hand on the side of your pet's chest to see if it rises with a breath.
3. Feel for air movement out of your pet's nostrils.

Step 2: Clear the Airway

1. Gently extend your pet's neck.
 2. Grab his tongue and pull it clear of his mouth.
 3. Check for visible airway obstructions (such as a toy or ball) and remove with your finger.
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Step 3: Mouth-to-Muzzle Breathing If your pet isn't breathing, start performing CPR.

1. Lay your pet on his side.
2. Wrap both hands tightly around your pet's muzzle so no air can escape.
3. Place your mouth over your pet's nostrils only. Blow into his nostrils for 2-3 seconds.
4. Remove your mouth for three seconds and check for breathing. Give 20 breaths per minute.
5. Repeat until your pet is breathing on his own.
6. Go immediately to a veterinary hospital, calling ahead so that they're prepared for your arrival.