

## **Basic Emergency First Aid for Pets**

<https://www.vetdepot.com/emergency-first-aid-for-pets.html>

Accidents happen. Whether an animal is injured, exposed to a poison, or experiences any other type of unexpected medical event, an owner who is prepared to provide immediate first aid is key to giving pets the best chance at a full recovery. Effective first aid buys the pet time to get to a veterinarian for appropriate care and can prevent secondary conditions from developing that worsen a pet's prognosis.

First aid is not a substitute for veterinary care. Ideally, one person should tend to the animal while another calls a veterinarian for advice regarding what to do next. If only one person is present, the call should be made as soon as the pet's condition is out of immediate danger.

People should not attempt to help an animal if it puts their own well-being at significant risk. Whenever possible, muzzle pets that may bite as a result of pain or fear. A makeshift muzzle can be made using a strip of cloth tied in a loose loop that is slid over the nose, tightened, and then tied behind the ears. Remove the muzzle as soon as it is safe to do so to allow the pet to breathe normally. If muzzling is impossible, a towel or blanket can be folded and placed over the pet's head to provide some protection.

### **Back Injuries**

Back injuries can cause pets to be unsteady when standing or walking, are often painful, and may result in paralysis (inability to move).

- Place a piece of plywood, board, rug, blanket, or sheet behind the pet's back.
- Gently slide the pet onto the "stretcher" while minimizing movement.
- Place a blanket over the pet and hold the edges down to prevent falls.
- Transport the pet to the nearest veterinarian.

### **Blunt Force Trauma**

Blunt force trauma can result in broken bones, injuries to organs, internal bleeding, and neurologic dysfunction, but the severity of a pet's injuries may not be immediately apparent. Even if the pet appears to be okay, it is always safest to have a veterinarian check the animal as soon as possible.

- Gently place small dogs and cats in a pet carrier with soft bedding lining the bottom.
- Larger dogs that are willing to walk should be allowed to get into a vehicle with a minimum of assistance.
- If a large dog cannot walk, follow the directions listed above for carrying a pet with a back injury.
- Transport the pet to the nearest veterinarian.

### **Broken Leg**

There are two kinds of fractures: open fractures where a bone protrudes through the skin and closed fractures where the ends of the bone remain covered with skin.

If a wound is evident at the site of the fracture, cover it with a loose bandage to prevent contamination and infection. Several layers of clean paper towel or a clean cloth can be held in place with tape.

To stabilize fractures of the lower leg, roll up some newspaper or a magazine and wrap the leg and the makeshift splint with strips of cloth, saran wrap, or an elastic (Ace) bandage. The bandage should not be tight enough to compromise blood flow.

- Do not try to straighten out the leg before splinting it.
- Start wrapping at the bottom of the leg, leaving the toes exposed, and move up as high on the leg as possible.

- Transport the pet to the nearest veterinarian.

### **Burns**

Burns can be caused by heat, chemicals, or friction. First degree burns affect only the top layer of skin and appear as reddened areas. Second degree burns are deeper and will lead to blistering. Third degree burns affect all the layers of the skin.

- Rinse the burned area with cold water for a few minutes. This will remove any chemicals or heat from the area preventing further damage.
- It can be difficult to assess the severity of a burn immediately after it has occurred. Therefore, it is always safest to have a veterinarian examine the pet as soon as possible.
- First degree burns can usually be treated with topical antibiotic ointments and pain relievers.
- Second degree burns may require oral antibiotics in addition to pain relievers and topical therapy.
- Third degree burns are potentially life-threatening and require immediate veterinary care.

### **Cardiopulmonary Arrest/CPR**

When a pet stops breathing and does not have a heart beat (feel by placing a hand over the left side of the pet's chest just behind the elbow), bystanders can initiate cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). While it is not often successful, it may give the pet time to get to the veterinary hospital.

- Lay the dog on its right side on a flat surface.
- Cover approximately one-third to one-half of the chest with your fingers or hand.
- Press down firmly and perform 100-120 chest compressions per minute.
- If you are comfortable doing so, perform mouth-to-snout ventilation (cover the pet's mouth and nose with your mouth, using a hand if necessary to keep the pet's lips closed) at a rate of two breaths given every 30 chest compressions.
- Check for spontaneous breathing and a heartbeat every minute or so. Stop CPR if the pet begins to breathe on its own.

### **Choking**

Food or other objects can get caught in a pet's throat. As long as the animal is coughing and/or breathing, it is best to simply rush it to the veterinary clinic. If the object becomes fully lodged in the windpipe and the animal can no longer breathe, a version of the Heimlich maneuver can be a lifesaver.

- Try to remove the object out of the back of the mouth ideally using pliers or tweezers.
- If you can't dislodge it after a couple of attempts, lay the pet on the ground on its side, place your hands over the widest part of the pet's chest and press down firmly to push as much air out of the lungs as quickly as possible.
- Repeat until the object is dislodged or you arrive at a veterinary hospital.

### **Heatstroke**

Heatstroke commonly develops when pets are left in cars or when they exercise or don't have access to cool water and shade when temperatures are high. Symptoms include a bright red tongue and gums, excessive panting, weakness, and collapse.

- Soak towels in cold water and place them around the dog's head, neck, armpits, and groin.
- Remove the towels as they warm, soak them in cold water again, and reapply.
- If towels are not available, run cool (not frigid) water over the dog's legs, armpits, groin, and belly.
- If the pet is able to drink, offer it a bowl of cold water.
- Transport the dog to a veterinarian in an air conditioned vehicle as quickly as possible.

## **Hypothermia**

Hypothermia is possible whenever pets are exposed to low temperatures, especially when they are wet, winds are high, or if they do not have access to shelter. Hypothermic pets initially shiver but will stop as they become colder. Lethargy and sleepiness are also possible.

- Take the pet into a warm building or car.
- Wrap the pet in blankets. Warm some in a dryer or use an electric blanket if available.
- Wrap warm water bottles in towels and place them under the blankets with the pet or have a person snuggle with the pet under the blankets.
- If the pet can drink, offer a bowl of warm water or broth.
- Do not rub any parts of the body that could be frostbitten.
- Transport the dog to a veterinarian in a heated vehicle as quickly as possible.

## **Poisoning**

Different types of poisons require different forms of first aid.

- If the packaging is available, follow any directions that are recommend for human exposure. For instance, if the label says to wash the chemical off the skin with water, do the same for pets. People caring for the pet should wear rubber gloves.
- Call a veterinarian or the ASPCA poison control center (888) 426-4435 for further information. Have information about the type of poison involved, amount the pet has been exposed to, and the pet's approximate weight readily available.
- Do not induce vomiting or give activated charcoal unless directed to do so by a veterinarian.
- If you are unsure of what a pet may have gotten into and it vomits, take a sample of the vomit to the veterinarian with you.

## **Seizures**

Brain injuries or disorders, poisons, organ dysfunction, blood sugar abnormalities, and idiopathic epilepsy are common causes of seizures in pets. A seizure that lasts for less than three or four minutes is generally not dangerous, but does need to be followed up with a veterinary exam to determine its underlying cause.

- While an animal is having a seizure, remove anything from its immediate environment that might result in an injury (e.g., furniture that could be knocked over) and make sure the pet is not near the top of a flight of stairs.
- Do not place anything in the pet's mouth.
- Keep the pet cool by placing a fan nearby.
- Make notes as to how long the seizure lasts and what it looked like.
- If the seizure lasts for longer than five minutes or if they occur in clusters, immediately head to the nearest veterinary clinic. For shorter seizures, call a veterinarian to make an appointment.

## **Shock**

Shock can be caused by blood loss, heart disease, infections, severe trauma, or anything that results in a lack of adequate oxygen delivery throughout the body. Symptoms of shock include a rapid heart rate and breathing, disorientation, weakness, and collapse. Shock can lead to organ failure and death and is a medical emergency.

- Cover the pet with blankets to keep it warm.
- Lay the pet down in a position where its head is level with the rest of its body.
- If applicable, control blood loss.
- Transport the pet to the nearest veterinarian as quickly as possible.

## **Wounds/Bleeding**

Penetrating wounds can result in blood loss, infection, and damage vital underlying organs.

- Apply a clean cloth or paper towels over the wound and apply pressure until the bleeding slows.
- Wrap the affected part of the body with an elastic (Ace) bandage, strips of cloth, or tape to hold it in place as you take the pet to the veterinarian.
- If blood soaks through the bandage, apply another layer over top without removing the first layer.
- For chest wounds where air is leaking through the wound, place a layer of plastic wrap over the wound, use petroleum or KY jelly to stick the plastic wrap to the surrounding skin, and bandage as above.
- If abdominal contents are protruding through the wound, gently place them back inside the abdomen if you can do so with little pressure and bandage as above.
- For severe bleeding from an extremity that doesn't improve with pressure, use a strip of cloth as a tourniquet above the wound. Loosen it for 15 seconds every 15 minutes as you travel to the veterinary clinic.