



The British Veterinary Centre

Pet First Aid

When your pet has an emergency, being prepared is very important. We cannot stress enough that you **SHOULD NOT** get on-line during a pet emergency or when your pet is **seriously** ill. In an emergency, first aid is not a substitute for veterinary treatment. However, before you are able to get your pet to a veterinarian, knowing some basic first aid can help. Always seek veterinary care following first-aid attempts.

- Breathing stops
- Choking
- Heatstroke
- Bleeding
- Seizures/fitting
- Shock
- Poisoning
- Bite wounds
- Fractures
- Burns
- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea



Breathing stops

Treatment/Action

Check to see if the animal is choking on a foreign object. If an animal is not breathing, place it on a firm surface with its left side up. Check for a heartbeat by listening at the area where the elbow touches the chest. If you hear a heartbeat but the animal is not breathing, close the animal's mouth and breathe directly into its nose--not the mouth--until the chest expands. Repeat 12 to 15 times per minute. If there is no pulse, apply heart massage at the same time. The heart is located in the lower half of the chest, behind the elbow of the front left leg. Place one hand below the heart to support the chest. Place the other hand over the heart and compress gently. To massage the hearts of cats and other tiny pets, compress the chest with the thumb and forefingers of one hand. Apply heart massage 80-120 times per minute for larger animals and 100-150 per minute for smaller ones. Alternate heart massage with breathing. **Please note: Even in the hands of well-trained veterinary health professionals, the success of resuscitation is very low overall.**

Call your veterinarian immediately.



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Choking

Symptoms: difficulty breathing, excessive pawing at the mouth, blue lips and tongue.

Treatment/Action

Be sure to protect yourself as well as the animal, as the pet will likely be frantic and may be more likely to bite. If the pet can still partially breathe, it is best to **keep the animal calm and get to a veterinarian as quickly as possible**. Look into the mouth to see if a foreign object in throat is visible. If you can, clear the airway by removing the object with pliers or tweezers, being careful not to push it farther down the throat. If it is lodged too deep or if the pet collapses, then place your hands on both sides of the animal's rib cage and apply firm, quick pressure. Or place the animal on its side and strike the side of the rib cage firmly with the palm of your hand three or four times. Repeat this procedure until the object is dislodged or you arrive at the veterinary clinic.

Call your veterinarian immediately.

Heatstroke

Symptoms: Rapid or laboured breathing, vomiting, high body temperature, collapse. Often seen after being outside in the heat, or in a non-air-conditioned room.

Treatment/Action

Take the animal away from the heat source. Check for any obstructions in the airway. **Wet the animal with cool water and fan dry. Do NOT use ice and do not overcool the animal. Do not wrap in wet towels.** Stop cooling when rectal temperature reaches 103 degrees Fahrenheit or 39.4 degrees Celsius.

Call veterinarian immediately, transport to your veterinary clinic straight away.

Bleeding

Treatment/Action

Apply firm, direct pressure over the bleeding area until the bleeding stops. **Hold the pressure for at least 10 straight minutes** (continually releasing the pressure to check the wound will stop the clotting). Avoid bandages that cut off circulation.

Call your veterinarian immediately.

Seizures/fitting

Symptoms: salivation, loss of control of urine or stool, violent muscle twitching, loss of consciousness.

Treatment/Action

Move the pet away from any objects that could be harmful during the seizure. Use a blanket for padding and protection. Do not put yourself at risk by restraining the pet during the seizure. Time the seizure. They usually last only 2 to 3 minutes. Afterwards, keep the animal calm and quiet.

Call your veterinarian immediately.



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Shock

Symptoms: Collapse, pale gums, cold extremities, not responding, irregular breathing.

Treatment/Action

Shock may occur as a result of a serious injury or fright. Keep the animal gently restrained, quiet, and warm, with the lower body elevated.

Call your veterinarian immediately.

Poisoning

Symptoms: vomiting, convulsions, diarrhoea, salivation, weakness, depression, pain.

Treatment/Action

Record what the pet ingested and how much. **Immediately call your veterinarian or poison control centre.** Do not induce vomiting. In case of toxins or chemicals on the skin from oils, paints, insecticides and other contact irritants, request directions on if and how to wash the toxin off.

Call your veterinarian immediately.

Bite wounds

Treatment/Action

Approach the pet carefully to avoid getting bitten. Muzzle the animal. Wear gloves when possible. Apply pressure to profusely bleeding wounds. Do not use a tourniquet. Check the wound for contamination or debris. If significant debris is present, then clean the wound with large amounts of saline or balanced electrolyte solution. If these are not available, then regular water may be used. Wrap large open wounds to keep them clean.

Bite wounds often become infected and need professional care. Call your veterinarian.

Fractures

Symptoms: Pain, inability to use a limb, or limb at odd angle.

Treatment/Action

Muzzle the pet and look for bleeding. If you can control bleeding without causing more injury, wear gloves and apply firm pressure to the wound for 10 straight minutes. Watch for signs of shock such as pale gums, cold extremities, and collapse. **DO NOT pull or tug on the limb.**

Call your veterinarian immediately. **Transport the pet to your veterinarian immediately**, supporting the injured part as best you can.



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Burns

Chemical, Electrical, or Heat including from a heating pad.

Symptoms: Singed hair, blistering, swelling, redness of skin.

Treatment/Action

Flush the burn immediately with large amounts of cool, running water. Wrap an ice pack in a light towel or other cover, do not apply an ice pack directly on the skin. Apply an ice pack for 15-20 minutes. If the animal has large quantities of dry chemicals on its skin, brush them off. Water may activate some dry chemicals.

Call your veterinarian immediately.

Diarrhoea

Symptoms: Watery and/or profuse amounts of stool.

Treatment/Action

If the animal is weak, not moving, or not eating, please call your veterinarian. If your animal is bright, withhold food for 12-24 hours, but give the animal water. Sometimes pets that appear to be straining are sore from diarrhoea rather than from constipation. Your veterinarian can help you decide which it is and what will help. Trying at-home treatments without knowing the real cause can make things worse.

Call your veterinarian.

Vomiting

Treatment/Action

If the animal is weak or not moving, call your veterinarian. If the animal is bright, withhold food for 24 hours. Give the pet ice cubes for two hours after vomiting stops, then slowly increase the amount of water available over a 24 hour period. After starving, introduce very small portions of a bland diet such as boiled chicken (cats) or boiled chicken and rice (dogs). Gradually increase quantity/frequency over 48 hours.

Call your veterinarian.

If you need to muzzle your pet

Use a strip of soft cloth, rope, necktie, or nylon stocking. Wrap around the nose, under the chin and tie behind the ears. Care must be taken when handling weak or injured pets. Even normally docile pets will bite when in pain. Allow the pet to pant after handling by loosening or removing the muzzle. Do not use a muzzle in a case of vomiting. Cats and small pets may be difficult to muzzle. A towel placed around the head will help control small pets.

If your pet can't walk

A door, board, blanket, or floor mat can be used as a stretcher to transport injured or weak animals. If your pet's emergency is not covered here, please call your veterinarian immediately. If you are away from home, you can find a veterinarian near you by using the AAHA-accredited hospital directory.