

Pet first aid – Basic procedures

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Emergency treatment and first aid for pets should never be used as a substitute for veterinary care. But it may save your pet's life before you can get your pet to a veterinarian.

Poisoning and Exposure to Toxins



Poisoning is a pet emergency that causes a great deal of confusion for pet owners. In general, any products that are harmful for people are also harmful for pets. Examples include cleaning products, rodent poisons and antifreeze. But you also need to be aware of common food items that may be harmful to your pet. The AVMA brochure [What You Should Know About Household Hazards to Pets](#) offers a summary of what foods and common household items may pose a danger to your pet. Additional information and examples can be found on the other Web sites listed in this section.

If your pet's skin or eyes are exposed to a toxic product (such as many cleaning products), check the product label for the instructions for people exposed to the product; if the label instructs you to wash your hands with soap and water if you're exposed, then wash your pet's skin with soap and water (don't get any into its eyes, mouth or nose). If the label tells you to flush the skin or eyes with water, do this for your pet as soon as possible (if you can do it safely), and call a veterinarian immediately.

If you know your pet has consumed something that may be harmful, or if the animal is having seizures, losing consciousness, is unconscious or is having difficulty breathing, telephone your veterinarian, emergency veterinary clinic or the **Animal Poison Control Center** hotline (**888.426.4435** – available 365 days/year, 24 hours/day) immediately. There is a fee for the consultation.

If possible, have the following information available:

- Species, breed, age, sex, weight and number of animals involved
- Symptoms
- Name/description of the substance that is in question; the amount the animal was exposed to; and the length of time of the exposure (how long it's been since your pet ate it or was exposed to it).
- Have the product container/packaging available for reference.

Collect any material your pet may have vomited or chewed, and place it in a plastic sealable bag to take with you when you bring your animal in for veterinary treatment.

Additional Information on Animal Poisoning:

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) offers additional information and resources-1-888-426-4435

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/poison-control/>

Another resource is [*Killer Grapes and Other Concerns in Animal Poison Control*](#), available on the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine's Web site.

Seizures

- Keep your pet away from any objects (including furniture) that might hurt it. Do not try to restrain the pet.
- Time the seizure (they usually last 2-3 minutes).
- After the seizure has stopped, keep your pet as warm and quiet as possible and contact your veterinarian.

Fractures

- Muzzle your pet.
- Gently lay your pet on a flat surface for support.
- While transporting your injured pet to a veterinarian, use a stretcher (you can use a board or other firm surface as a stretcher, or use a throw rug or blanket as a sling). If possible, secure the pet to the stretcher (make sure you don't put pressure on the injured area or the animal's chest) for transport—this may be as simple as wrapping a blanket around them.
- You can attempt to set the fracture with a homemade splint, but remember that a badly-placed splint may cause more harm than good. If in doubt, it is always best to leave the bandaging and splinting to a veterinarian.

Bleeding (external)



- Muzzle your pet.
- Press a clean, thick gauze pad over the wound, and keep pressure over the wound with your hand until the blood starts clotting. This will often take several minutes for the clot to be strong enough to stop the bleeding. Instead of checking it every few seconds to see if it has clotted, hold pressure on it for a minimum of 3 minutes and then check it.
- If bleeding is severe and on the legs, apply a tourniquet (using an elastic band or gauze) between the wound and the body, and apply a bandage and pressure over the wound. Loosen the tourniquet for 20 seconds every 15-20 minutes. Severe bleeding can quickly be life-threatening—get your animal to a veterinarian *immediately* if this occurs.

Bleeding (internal)

- Symptoms: bleeding from nose, mouth, rectum, coughing up blood, blood in urine, pale gums, collapse, weak and rapid pulse.
- Keep animal as warm and quiet as possible and transport immediately to a veterinarian.

Burns

- Chemical
 - Muzzle the animal.
 - Flush burn immediately with large quantities of water.
- Severe
 - Muzzle the animal.
 - Quickly apply ice water compress to burned area.

Choking



- Symptoms: difficulty breathing, excessive pawing at the mouth, choking sounds when breathing or coughing, blue-tinged lips/tongue.
- Use caution – a choking pet is more likely to bite in its panic.
- If the pet can still breathe, keep it calm and get it to a veterinarian.
- Look into the pet's mouth to see if a foreign object is visible. If you see an object, gently try to remove it with pliers or tweezers, but be careful not to push the object further down the throat. Don't spend a lot of time trying to remove it if it's not easy to reach—don't delay, and get your pet to a veterinarian immediately.
- If you can't remove the object or your pet collapses, place both hands on the side of your pet's rib cage and apply firm quick pressure, or lay your pet on its side and strike the rib cage firmly with the palm of your hand 3-4 times. The idea behind this is to sharply push air out of their lungs and push the object out from behind. Keep repeating this until the object is dislodged or until you arrive at the veterinarian's office.

Heatstroke

- **Never** leave your pet in the car on warm days. The temperature inside a car can rise very quickly to dangerous levels, even on milder days. Pets can succumb to heatstroke very easily and must be treated very quickly to give them the best chance of survival.
- If you cannot immediately get your pet to a veterinarian, move it to a shaded area and out of direct sunlight.
- Place a cool or cold, wet towel around its neck and head (do not cover your pet's eyes, nose or mouth).
- Remove the towel, wring it out, and rewet it and rewrap it every few minutes as you cool the animal.
- Pour or use a hose to keep water running over the animal's body (especially the abdomen and between the hind legs), and use your hands to massage its legs and sweep the water away as it absorbs the body heat.
- Transport the pet to a veterinarian as soon as possible.

Shock

- Symptoms: weak pulse, shallow breathing, nervousness, dazed eyes.
- Usually follows severe injury or extreme fright.
- Keep animal restrained, warm and quiet.
- If animal is unconscious, keep head level with rest of body.
- Transport the pet immediately to a veterinarian.

What to do if your pet is not breathing



- Stay calm
- If possible, have another person call the veterinarian while you help your pet.
- Check to see if your pet is unconscious.
- Open your pet's airway by gently grasping its tongue and pulling it forward (out of the mouth) until it is flat. Check the animal's throat to see if there are any foreign objects blocking the airway (see the section above on [Choking](#))
- Perform rescue breathing by closing your pet's *mouth* (hold it closed with your hand) and breathing with your mouth directly into its *nose* until you see the animal's chest expand. Once the chest expands, continue the rescue breathing once every 4 or 5 seconds.

What to do if your pet has no heartbeat

Do not begin chest compressions until you've secured an airway and started rescue breathing (see the section above, [What to do if your pet is not breathing](#)).

- Gently lay your pet on its right side on a firm surface. The heart is located in the lower half of the chest on the left side, just behind the elbow of the front left leg. Place one hand underneath the pet's chest for support and place the other hand over the heart.
- For dogs, press down gently on your pet's heart about one inch for medium-sized dogs; press harder for larger animals and with less force for smaller animals.
- To massage the hearts of cats and other tiny pets, cradle your hand around the animal's chest so your thumb is on the left side of the chest and your fingers are on the right side of the chest, and compress the chest by squeezing it between your thumb and fingers.
- Press down 80-120 times per minute for larger animals and 100-150 times per minute for smaller ones.
- Don't perform rescue breathing and chest compressions at the same exact time; alternate the chest compressions with the rescue breaths, or work as a team with another person so one person performs chest compressions for 4-5 seconds and stops long enough to allow the other person to give one rescue breath.
- Continue until you can hear a heartbeat and your pet is breathing regularly, or you have arrived at the veterinary clinic and they can take over the resuscitation attempts.

Please remember that your pet's likelihood of surviving with resuscitation is very low. However, in an emergency it may give your pet its only chance.

Always remember that any first aid administered to your pet should be followed by immediate veterinary care. First aid care is not a substitute for veterinary care, but it may save your pet's life until it receives veterinary treatment.