

Common Pet Emergencies and First Aid

Allergic reaction

An allergic reaction may be the result of vaccinations, medications, new objects in the household (new Carpet or a new dog bed), insect bites, or new foods.

Mild Reaction

Sign:

1. Intensive itching and redness of skin
2. Swelling (especially around the muzzle, ears and eyes)
3. Hives
4. Vomiting and/or diarrhea

First Aid: Seek veterinary attention immediately.

Severe Reaction (Anaphylactic Shock)

Can appear seconds to one to two hours after exposure.

Signs:

1. Pale gums
2. Fainting or collapse
3. Difficulty breathing
4. Repeated vomiting and/or diarrhea

First Aid: Seek veterinary attention immediately.

Snake bites

Signs differ depending on the type and size of the snake, the season, the location of the bite and the severity of the bite.

Signs:

1. Fang puncture wounds usually on the head, neck or limbs
2. Pain and swelling of the bite area with severe bruising.
3. Breathing difficulties
4. Paralysis with certain snake species.

First Aid: Seek veterinary attention immediately.

Insect or Spider bites

Insects (bees, wasps, earwigs) or spiders (black widows, brown recluse) can cause localized effects and/or generalized signs of an allergic reaction. Usually, by the time you realize a problem, the biting insect has already flown or crawled away, so that a presumptive diagnosis and treatment protocol is often instituted by the veterinarian.

Signs:

- Localized redness, swelling and pain
- Lameness
- Salivation
- Signs of allergic reaction
- Breathing difficulties

First Aid:

- Seek veterinary attention immediately.

Heat Stroke

Panting is the main mechanism for an animal to release some of its body heat. Heat stroke may occur through extended exposure to heat, excessive exercise, and/or the inability to release enough body heat. Brachiocephalic (Short nosed) breeds have smaller airways, making panting less efficient. So, breeds such as the bulldog, boxer, pug, etc., as well as rabbits, tend to be more prone to heat stroke.

Signs:

- Fever of 104-105 F or more
- Red gums
- Heavy panting or difficult loud breathing, often raspy or
- Weakness, staggering/incoordination or even loss of consciousness
- Vomiting/diarrhea
- External and/or internal bleeding without any evident trauma
- Seizure

First Aid:

NEVER USE ICE OR COLD WATER

- Slowly cool down using warm/cool wet towels on body, or between legs.
- Immediately go to a veterinary facility to evaluate the status of such serious or even fatal changes in the body.
- Delayed treatment may make the difference between an uneventful recovery and death.

Electric shock

Electrical cords pose a threat to playful animals as they pounce and bite the "snakelike" toy, or to the "indiscriminate chewers".

Immediate signs:

- Sudden cry
- Burns on corner of mouth
- Unconsciousness
- Staggering/incoordination
- Not breathing

Long-term signs:

- Difficulties breathing
- Coughing
- Oral Lesions (ulcers/sloughing/foul odor)
- Inappetence
- Incoordination

First Aid:

- If the animal is still attached to or close to the electrical cord, unplug the appliance. Unplug only if you can avoid touching the animal and the live wires. Otherwise, turn off the electricity prior to separating the animal from the power source.
- Transfer the animal to a veterinary facility as soon as possible when you have become aware of or suspect an electrocution. Every victim needs a thorough examination, with possible chest radiographs. The secondary (long term) signs develop within hours and can potentially become fatal if not monitored and treated accordingly.

Prevention:

- Cover electric cords.
- Keep extension cords to a minimum.
- Always be aware of young animals and pocket pets and their activities, if they are allowed free range of the home.
- If the animal is kenneled or caged, make sure all electric cords are well out of reach of being pulled in.

Eye injuries

Injury to the eye may occur as a result of direct trauma, sudden environmental changes (low humidity, strong winds, heavy dust), glaucoma, systemic infections or inflammation, and/or a culmination of chronic symptoms. Breed disposition may increase the risk of various types of eye problems. Pugs, for example, have more protruding eyes and thus are more prone to direct trauma and/or proptosed globes. Cocker Spaniels may develop more corneal ulcers due to a higher tendency for "dry eye" (decrease or lack of tear production) in the breed.

Signs:

- Swollen eyelid
- Cloudy eye (white, blue, dull yellow or red)
- Visible damage to the cornea, conjunctiva or the globe
- Bleeding or liquid discharge from the eye
- Squinting of one or both eyes
- Protruding globe (proptosed)
- Object in the conjunctiva, cornea or globe (may not be easily visible)

First Aid:

- Vision can quickly become compromised or lost. Transfer the animal to a veterinary facility as soon as possible
- Do not let your pet rub or scratch the eye.
- If the animal is unable to close the eyelids over the eye (as in a proptosed eye), coat the eye with a water-soluble gel (KY Jelly) until seen by a veterinarian.

Prevention:

- Do not let your pet put its head out of a moving vehicle.
- Protect your pets from high winds, especially in sandy conditions.
- Avoid walking your pets through high grasses and shrubs.
- Pets with very itchy skin (whether due to chronic allergies or an acute reaction) may rub vigorously along the ground, potentially irritating the eye. See your veterinarian if your pet demonstrates excessive itching.

Choking and oral foreign objects

Pets, like children, can choke by chewing on small toys, balls, pieces of toys, bones, rawhides, etc. Often, the object may simply be lodged between teeth or at the back of the throat, and though they may not hinder any breathing, will be extremely annoying to the animal. A true choking victim has the object completely blocking the airway, allowing minimal or no air to pass. These patients are critical, and time is crucial.

Signs:

- Coughing/gagging
- Gasping or inability to breathe or cough
- Pawing at mouth
- Severe drooling/salivation
- Cyanotic mucous membranes (blue/purple gums)
- Staggering or loss of consciousness
- Visualization of foreign object in mouth/throat
- Foul odor from the mouth (if the object has been caught for some time)

First Aid:

- Be very careful about placing your fingers into the mouth! They will bite as a reflex, and may scratch vehemently.
- Animal may be frantic. Attempt to calm the animal (and yourself).
- Try to visualize the object. If reachable, use hemostats, pliers, etc., to dislodge the object. (Again, be very careful about using your fingers.)
- If the object is still lodged deep in the throat, and the animal is not able to pass any air, use the Heimlich Maneuver.
- Always check the mouth after 3-4 chest or abdominal thrusts for loosening of the choking object.

Heimlich Maneuver

<20 lbs.

- Position the animal head down. Use a support hold, propping him/her between your knees, on pillows, etc.
- Place 3-4 gently thumps on the side of the chest.

>20 lbs.

- Place the animal on its back.
- Place the palm of one hand at the base of the sternum (very front of the abdomen). Put your other hand over the first hand for more support.
- Use gentle thrusts from the abdominal cavity, upward into the rib cage.

Once the object of the choking victim is successfully dislodged, transfer the animal to a veterinary facility as soon as possible to allow guidance on the necessary follow-up treatments or diagnostics.

Severe secondary damage can happen to the throat tissues, as well as the lungs and ribs, compromising the health of the seemingly recovered victim and may even lead to death well past the choking event.

Prevention:

- Do not allow pets to play with small objects.
- Ask your veterinarian what size limitations are appropriate for your size pet.
- Do not allow your pets to chew on rawhides or similar chewables without supervision.
- Once a chew piece gets too small, do not allow further chewing. Throw it away!
- Check all toys for removable parts.
- Use only chew resistant toys.
- Do not give bones as chew toys. Even bones that do not splinter can still cause choking if the animal tries to swallow too large a piece. Other bones can become lodged around the jaw.

Vomiting and Diarrhea

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Vomiting and diarrhea may be caused by eating too fast or by eating scraps from the garbage. It is important to realize that digestive upset can also be a sign of numerous other ailments: dietary allergies, poisons, stress, infections, worms, metabolic disorders (diabetes, pancreatitis), and cancer. Some illnesses become very serious, possibly fatal, if left untreated.

If your pet is on any medication when vomiting occurs, notify your veterinarian immediately.

To help the veterinarian evaluate your pet's condition, note the color, consistency, frequency of the vomiting. Even details such as the time span between eating/drinking and vomiting or the strength of the vomiting can help your vet form a diagnostic and treatment plan.

First Aid for Vomiting:

- Transfer the animal to a veterinary facility as soon as possible. Pets can get fatally dehydrated within hours.
- Do not give any medications without consulting your veterinarian.
- Take all food and water away for 12 hours, but if you feel your pet is very thirsty, give no more than 1-2 ice cubes every 2 hours. After 12 hours, if there is no vomiting, offer small amount (a few laps) of water. DO NOT GIVE MILK
- After another 12 hours, if there is no vomiting, begin your pet on a bland diet. Initially give frequent, small meals (a small meatball size).
- Continue the bland diet for 1-2 days, dividing the daily ration into your pet's regular mealtime(s).
- Then, over the two days, gradually switch your pet to their regular diet by slowly adding, in increasing amounts, their regular pet food and decreasing the amount of the bland diet being fed.

First Aid for Diarrhea:

- Transfer the animal to a veterinary facility as soon as possible. Pets can get fatally dehydrated within hours.
- Supply unlimited water to help prevent dehydration.
- As long as your pet is not vomiting, you may start your pet on a bland diet in small frequent meals.

Signs of a more serious condition include:

- Abdominal pain
- Lethargy or weakness
- Fever
- Disoriented or stumbling around
- Dehydration or excessive, insatiable thirst
- Vomiting or attempts to vomit of more than 3-4 times in an hour
- Diarrhea for more than 24 hours
- Blood-tinged vomitus and/or stools

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- Black or tarry stools

If you see any of the above signs, Transfer the animal to a veterinary facility immediately. They may be signs of poisoning, stomach or intestinal blockage, ulcers, kidney/liver disorders, or even brain tumors.

Prevention:

- Keep your pet(s) out of all trash.
- Feed your pet(s) a consistent brand and type of diet. If you must make a change in their food, make the transition over 4-5+ days. Gradually mix the new diet, slowly eliminating the old food.
- If your pet has special dietary needs, contact your veterinarian before any changes in diet.
- Minimize or eliminate table scraps for your pet.
- Consult your veterinarian regarding vaccination and deworming programs best suited for your area.
- Keep small chewable objects away from your pets.
- Do not let your pets (especially cats and ferrets) play with strings or threads.

Bland Diet

Mix one carbohydrate food item with one protein food item at a ratio of 1/4 protein and 3/4 carbohydrate proteins;

Proteins: Lean hamburger (cooked & drained), Low-fat cottage cheese, Boiled skinless & boneless chicken breast.

Carbohydrates: Boiled plain pasta, Boiled potatoes, Boiled white rice

Feed approximately 4 ounces (1/4 cup) of protein and 16 ounces (one cup) of cooked carbohydrate per 20 pounds of body weight daily.

Poisoning

Animals may intentionally ingest the toxin, or become poisoned through accidental exposure.

Signs may include:

- Vomiting and/or Diarrhea
- Excessive salivation
- Depression/lethargy
- Changes in behavior (anxious, shivering)
- Painful abdomen
- Seizures
- Staggering/unconsciousness
- Bleeding or bruising
- Breathing difficulties (panting, gasping)
-

First Aid:

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- If you see or know that your pet has ingested a toxin, Call Poison control <https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control>
- If you suspect your pet has ingested a toxin, contact a veterinarian immediately.
- Do not begin treating your pet until you have spoken to a veterinary staff member.
- For some toxins you may be advised to induce vomiting with Hydrogen Peroxide.
- Transfer the animal to a veterinary facility as soon as possible. Bring a sample of the suspected toxin with the original container to the veterinary facility.

Prevention:

- Become familiar with common toxins (see below), to avoid accidental exposure.
- Do not rely on packaging to keep your pets out of trouble. Unlike children, animals can and will chew through child safety closures.
- Keep all medications and chemicals out of your pets' reach. (Remember they can jump or even reach through cages.)
- Do not administer any medications (no matter how seemingly harmless or mild) to an animal without first contacting a veterinarian. Many drugs intended for one species will kill another species if given in even the smallest dosages.

Sample Toxins

Ethylene Glycol (Antifreeze)

Ethylene glycol is most commonly found in antifreeze, but can also be found in some detergents, paints, polishes, pharmaceuticals, and cosmetics. Because of its sweet taste it is one of the more common poisonings seen in dogs and cats. A mere four ounces of ethylene glycol can be fatal to a 60-pound dog or 1-1/2 teaspoons to an average 10-pound cat. Even walking through an antifreeze contaminated puddle, then licking the paws can be enough to produce toxic signs.

Signs are seen within half hour to 12 hours of ingestion:

- Drunken gait, staggering
- Depression
- Vomiting
- Seizures
- Coma
- Death

First Aid:

- Transfer the animal to a veterinary facility as soon as possible. Treatment must be started as soon as possible to increase chance of survival. If you see your animal ingest any amount of ethylene glycol seek veterinary attention

Prevention:

- Use and encourage your neighbors and friends to use propylene glycol based antifreeze.
- Do not allow your pets to drink or walk through water puddles from which you do not know the origin.

Chocolate

Dogs and cats cannot metabolize the theobromine (caffeine like) in chocolate, potentially causing serious stomach upset, nervous excitement, fast heart rate and/or blood disorders. As little as one ounce of milk chocolate per 20 pounds is enough to create toxin signs. Semi-sweet chocolate and baker's chocolate require much less amounts to cause serious signs.

Signs:

- Vomiting and/or Diarrhea
- Hyperactivity and excitement
- Seizures
- Severe depression
- Coma
- Death

First Aid:

- Transfer the animal to a veterinary facility as soon as possible. You may or may not be instructed to induce vomiting.

Prevention:

- Keep all chocolates well out of reach of pets. Remember, the smell is intense, they will chew through bags, jump, or climb on counters to reach the treat.
- Beware of placing any wrapped gift packages within pets' reach especially during holidays, they may contain chocolates

Xylitol

Xylitol is a sugar free sweetener used more commonly in Sugar Free Gum. It increased the sensitivity if the animals to their own insulin and causes life threatening hypoglycemia (Low blood sugar). It also causes liver damage.

Signs:

- Vomiting and/or Diarrhea
- Severe depression
- Seizures

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- Coma
- Death

First Aid:

- Transfer the animal to a veterinary facility as soon as possible. Low blood sugar can be fatal within hours.

Prevention:

- Keep all sugar free gum well out of reach of pets. Remember, the smell is intense, they will chew through bags, jump, or climb on counters to reach the treat.
- Beware of placing any wrapped gift packages within pets' reach especially during holidays, they may contain chocolates

Common Toxins:

<https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control>

Acetaminophen	Fleet Enemas	Oven cleaners
Alcohol	Fluoride	Paint/varnish remover
Antifreeze	Furniture polish	Perfumes
Antihistamines	Gasoline	Petroleum Distillates
Ammonia	Gila Monsters	Pine Oil Disinfectants
Aspirin Barbiturates	Glues and adhesives	Pyrethrin's
Caffeine	Hair Sprays	Rodenticides
Carbamates	Hair colorings	Rubbing alcohol
Carbon Monoxide	Insecticides	Rust removers
Crayons	Ibuprofen	Scorpions
Chocolate	Insects	Shampoo
Copper pennies	Indoor plants	Snakes
Cosmetics	Livestock dips	Spiders
De-icers	Lye	Spoiled foods
DDT	Lead	Strychnine
Drugs (marijuana, etc.)	Matches	Styptic pencils
Deodorants	Metal cleaners	Suntan lotion
Denture cleaners	Nail polish	Tar
Disinfectants	Nicotine	Tiger Moths
Drain cleaners	OFF insect spray	Toilet bowl cleaners
Fertilizers	Onions	Toads
Fireplace colors	Organophosphate	Warfarin
Fireworks	Overheated fat	Wax

Common Poisonous Plants:

<https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control>

Caster Bean	Lily of the Valley	Poison Hemlock
Daphne	Lobelia	Sago Palm
Foxglove	Mistletoe	Water Hemlock
Larkspur	Monkshood	Yew

Urinary Tract Symptoms

Urinary tract signs are frequent, and unfortunately, quite often ambiguous as to the cause. They may indicate trauma, bacterial infection, inflammation, the presence of crystals or stones in the bladder or urethra, tumors, or even metabolic disorders.

Due to the small size of the male cat's urinary tract, it can easily become blocked if crystals or heavy mucous "plugs" form.

Bladder stones that are trying to pass may also block male dogs (especially Dalmatians).

Signs:

- Straining to urinate, often with vocalization
- Frequent urination and generally only small amounts
- Blood in urine
- Urinating in inappropriate areas
- Unable to get comfortable, restless
- Abdominal discomfort or pain
- Excessive licking of the genital region
- Vomiting
- Decreased appetite
- Lethargy/depression

First Aid:

- Transfer the animal to a veterinary facility as soon as possible. Any urinary blockage can be fatal within hours

Bloat/Gastric Dilation and Volvulus (GDV)

Large, deep chested dogs are especially prone to acquiring this critical condition. The stomach fills with swallowed air or excessive stomach gases, becoming over-distended. At that point, the dog is unable to belch or vomit, and cannot release any pressure. The stomach continues to extend and often rotates. This excessive extension and ensuing twisting cuts off circulation to the stomach tissues causing severe pain, shock, and eventual death within hours.

Signs:

- Distension of the abdomen behind the ribs
- Drum-like or resonant "pinging" sound when tapping on the abdomen
- Repeated attempts to vomit, producing only small amounts of clear fluid (saliva)
- Unproductive retching or vomiting
- Acting painful (extremely painful as the condition progresses)
- Unable to get comfortable
- Depression
- Shock
- Death

First Aid:

- Transfer the animal to a veterinary facility immediately. This is a critical, life-threatening condition requiring veterinary attention.

Prevention:

- Do not heavily exercise your dog 45-60 minutes before or after a meal.
- Do not allow your dog to drink large volumes of water shortly before or after heavy exercise.
- Never feed your dog excessive amounts of food, especially if changing diets.

Birthing

Usually the mother is able to deliver her puppy without assistance, but occasionally she may need the help of either you or a veterinarian.

When to take the animal to a veterinary facility:

- The mother has gone >70-72 days from the first breeding or 68-70 days from the last breeding.
- The mother is going > 30-60 minutes with contractions and without producing any puppies/kittens.
- The mother is going >3 hours between deliveries.
- The mother has produced part of the fetus and then stopped.
- The mother is passing foul smelling, brown fluid.
- The mother is nervous, weak, or restless more than one hour after labor stops. There may be another baby.
- The mother's muscles begin to tremble days or weeks after giving birth. She is having difficulties standing and she is vomiting.

Seizures

Most seizures will stop within a few minutes, though the animal may be a little confused, dazed, or agitated for another few moments or few hours longer. Be aware, it is not uncommon for additional seizures to occur within the first 24

hours. Potential causes may be epilepsy, a toxin/poison, head trauma, heat stroke, a brain tumor, infection in the brain or spinal cord, or low blood sugar.

Signs:

- Focal Seizure (Petit Mal): Slight muscle tremors of individual or groups of muscles with full conscious awareness present. Some animals may show changes in personality, most commonly hiding and/or aggression.
- Tonic Clonic (Grand Mal): convulsions, patient is incoherent, laying on its side, leg paddling. Mouth chattering, with foaming at the mouth. May urinate or defecate.

First Aid:

- Transfer the animal to a veterinary facility immediately. During a seizure, be safe - avoid close contact that may risk bite.

To Transport:

- Small animals: Place a thick blanket over the animal's entire body. Scoop up into your arms like a baby.
- Larger dogs: Use a heavy blanket to cover its head (and help protect you). Have someone help carry the hind end.

Trauma

With any trauma, it is strongly advised to have the animal seen immediately by a veterinarian. After a traumatic incident, it may be easy to evaluate external injuries (cuts, bruises, hurt legs, broken teeth, etc.), but many times internal injuries have occurred. Without immediate diagnosis and appropriate treatment of such internal injuries, the animal may continue suffering, have delayed healing, and even die within hours. Realize, some trauma victims may not show external injuries at all, yet have extensive internal injuries. Sometimes it may take hours, days, and in some injuries like diaphragmatic hernia, even months before clinical signs become evident.

Signs:

- Witnessed traumatic event like being hit or ran over by car, falling from a height, animal attack or fight.
- Visible lameness/deviation of limb
- Visible wounds/bleeding
- Unwillingness to walk, or lay down
- Unwillingness to lift head/neck
- Staggering/incoordination
- Altered mental status/unconsciousness/seizures.

Respiratory Distress

Respiratory distress can be caused by a number of diseases, for example, heart disease, pleural effusion, and pneumonia. **Any animal in respiratory distress must be seen by a veterinarian immediately.**

Signs:

- Labored breathing
- Open mouthed breathing - especially in cats
- Head and neck stretched out, elbows pointed outward
- Blue, pale-white, or gray gum color
- Bloody, foamy nasal discharge

First Aid:

- Minimize stress
- Transfer the animal to a veterinary facility immediately. Respiratory distress it is a sign of a severe problem and can be fatal in a few minutes.

Shock (Circulatory Shock)

Shock is a result of severe trauma or certain medical conditions. In shock, the blood fails to circulate properly; as a result, the organs and tissues do not get enough oxygen to function normally.

Shock needs to be managed with intravenous fluids and medications administered by a veterinarian; therefore, the animal needs to be seen by a veterinarian immediately to increase its chances for survival.

Signs:

- Rapid heart rate
- Weak thready pulse
- Cold, pale gums
- Weakness
- Stupor or unconsciousness
- Panting or labored breathing
- Subnormal temperature

Managing Shock:

- Wrap the animal with blankets to try to raise the body temperature. Do not use in heat source of any kind as it may exacerbate the shock.
- Minimize stress.
- Transfer the animal to a veterinary facility immediately. Shock is a sign of a severe problem and can be fatal in a few minutes.

Chest Injuries

Because the chest usually has "negative pressure" (or vacuum) between the lung tissue and the chest wall (ribs and muscle), any leaks in the system severely jeopardize the breathing mechanism. If this vacuum effect disappears, the body cannot draw air into the lungs. Or, if enough air, blood, or tissue leak

between the lungs and the chest wall, then the lungs cannot expand to inhale enough air.

Signs:

- Visualized open wound on the animal's chest or witnessed trauma.
- Animal may be in respiratory distress

First Aid:

- Minimize stress.
- Transfer the animal to a veterinary facility immediately. Respiratory distress can be fatal in a few minutes.

Bleeding

The primary concern with heavy bleeding is to locally stop or decrease continued loss. Loss of large amount of blood will result in "hypovolemic shock", in which the body does not have enough blood volume to properly maintain circulation.

First Aid

- Keep the wound as clean as possible
- Direct Pressure - use a clean cloth and place heavy pressure at the location of bleeding.
- To protect larger wounds from further trauma and drying out, use a water-soluble lubricant gel (i.e., KY Jelly)
- Transfer to a veterinary facility immediately

Prevention

- Many times, your animal will get cut without you knowing how. Some things to watch out for are metal lawn edging, barbed wire fences, and broken glass.

Toenail bleeding: First Aid

- Use hemostatic powder (Kwik Stop) to stop the bleeding. Dampen a cotton tipped applicator and dip into the hemostatic powder. Apply it to the bleeding toenail with slight pressure.

Bandaging: First Aid

- Lightly dress the wound with a non-stick bandage.
- Wrap the dressing with gauze and/or vet-rap from the foot up, tight enough to keep pressure on the wound but not to cut off the circulation of blood.
- Transfer to a veterinary facility immediately

Fractured Limbs

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The veterinarian will examine the injured limb and perform the necessary radiographs for evaluation. The sooner proper treatment is initiated, the sooner pain management can begin, infections kept under control, and healing can progress. Surgery may or may not be indicated.

Closed-fracture - Broken bone(s) with no puncture through the skin

Open fracture - Broken bone(s) with bones protruding through the skin

Signs:

- Non-weight bearing on one leg
- See the bone protruding through the skin
- Extremely painful in one leg
- Abnormal positioning of the leg

First Aid:

- Transfer to a veterinary facility immediately

Normal Values

Species	Temperature (F)	Pulse (beat/min)	Respirations (breaths/min)
Dog	99.5-102.5	80-140	14-40
Cat	100-102.5	150-180	20-40