FIRST AID TIPS
FOR PET OWNERS

What would you do if ...

- Your dog ate a bag of semi-sweet chocolate chips that was left out on the kitchen counter?
- Your dog fell down the stairs and starting limping?
- Your cat had a seizure right in front of you?
- Your cat was overheating on a hot summer day?

To avoid the feelings of panic that may accompany these situations, we recommend the following steps to better prepare you for a pet medical emergency. The following links summarize the basics you need for giving first aid care to your pet.

FIRST AID SUPPLIES

Our handy checklist tells you all the supplies you should have on hand for pet first aid. Print out a copy to use for shopping, and keep a copy on your refrigerator or next to the first aid kit for your family, for quick reference in emergencies.

FIRST AID WHEN TRAVELING WITH YOUR PET

A few simple steps can better prepare you to help your pet in first aid situations while you are traveling. Remember: pet medical emergencies don’t just happen at home.

BASIC PET FIRST AID PROCEDURES

Read our simple instructions for providing emergency first aid if your pet is suffering from poisoning, seizures, broken bones, bleeding, burns, shock, heatstroke, choking or other urgent medical problems. Print out a copy to keep with your pet emergency kit.

PETS AND DISASTERS

Whether confronted by natural disasters such as hurricanes, or unexpected catastrophes such as a house fire, you need to be prepared to take care of your animals. A pre-determined disaster plan will help you remain calm and think clearly.

ADDITIONAL PET FIRST AID RESOURCES:

- American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA)/Healthy Pet: Pet First Aid
- The University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine: Basic First Aid for Your Pet
- American Red Cross: First Aid for Pets
- VeterinaryPartner.com: First Aid and Emergency Care

* 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.
**PET FIRST AID SUPPLIES CHECKLIST**

As a pet owner, you need to make sure to have basic first aid supplies for your pets in your household. Carefully putting together a well-provisioned first aid kit will make you more ready to deal with a medical emergency if one confronts you for your dog, cat or other pet. Have this kit in the house and fully stocked with supplies at all times, next to the first aid kit for your family. Many of the items in a family first aid kit can be used for pets, too.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phone numbers and your pet’s medical record (including medications and vaccination history)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Veterinarian:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Poison Control Center: 888-4ANI-HELP (888-426-4435) <em>(there may be a fee for this call)</em></td>
<td>Veterinary Emergency Clinic: 716.839.4043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gauze</td>
<td>For wrapping wounds or muzzling the injured animal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonstick bandages, towels, or strips of clean cloth</td>
<td>To control bleeding or protect wounds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adhesive tape for bandages</td>
<td>For securing the gauze wrap or bandage</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>do NOT use human adhesive bandages (eg, Band-Aids®) on pets</em></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Milk of magnesia, Activated charcoal | To absorb poison  
*Always contact your veterinarian or local poison control center before inducing vomiting or treating an animal for poison* |
| Hydrogen peroxide (3%) | To induce vomiting  
*Always contact your veterinarian or local poison control center before inducing vomiting or treating an animal for poison* |
| Digital Thermometer | To check your pet's temperature. Do not insert a thermometer in your pet's mouth—the temperature must be taken rectally. |
| *you will need a “fever” thermometer because the temperature scale of regular thermometers doesn’t go high enough for pets* |  |
| Eye dropper (or large syringe without needle) | To give oral treatments or flush wounds |
| Muzzle (in an emergency a rope, necktie, soft cloth, nylon stocking, small towel may be used) | To cover your pet’s head.  
*If your pet is vomiting, do not muzzle it!* |
| Leash | To transport your pet (if your pet is capable of walking without further injury) |
| Stretcher (in an emergency a door, board, blanket or floor mat may be used) | To stabilize the injured animal and prevent further injury during transport |
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. 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.

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

- 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.

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 re wet 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.

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).

STROKE

• Symptoms: weak pulse, shallow breathing, nervousness, dazed eyes.
• Usually follows severe injury or extreme fright.
• 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.
HANDLING AN INJURED PET

BASIC PROCEDURES

If your pet is injured, it could be in pain and is also most likely scared and confused. You need to be careful to avoid getting hurt, bitten or scratched.

- Never assume that even the gentlest pet will not bite or scratch if injured. Pain and fear can make animals unpredictable or even dangerous.
- Don’t attempt to hug an injured pet, and always keep your face away from its mouth. Although this may be your first impulse to comfort your pet, it might only scare the animal more or cause them pain.
- Perform any examination slowly and gently. Stop if your animal becomes more agitated.
- Call your veterinarian or an emergency veterinary clinic before you move your pet so they can be ready for you when you arrive.
- If necessary and if your pet is not vomiting, place a muzzle on the pet to reduce the chances you’ll be bitten.
- Dogs may be muzzled with towels, stockings or gauze rolls.
- Cats and other small animals may be wrapped in a towel to restrain them, but make sure your pet is not wrapped in the towel too tightly and its nose is uncovered so it can breathe.
- NEVER muzzle your pet if it is vomiting.
- If possible, try to stabilize injuries before moving an injured animal by splinting or bandaging them.
- While transporting your injured pet, keep it confined in a small area to reduce the risk of additional injury. Pet carriers work well, or you can use a box or other container (but make sure your pet has enough air). For larger dogs, you can use a board, toboggan/sled, door, throw rug, blanket or something similar to act as a stretcher.
- You should always keep your pet’s medical records in a safe, easily accessible place. Bring these with you when you take your dog for emergency treatment.

TRAVELING WITH YOUR PET

FIRST AID

Pet medical emergencies don’t just happen at home. A few simple steps can better prepare you to help your pet with first aid treatment while you are traveling.

- When traveling, pack a simple travel-size first aid kit for your pet, similar to the one you have at home, along with an anti diarrheal medication that is safe for animals (ask your veterinarian to suggest a product). Cat emerging from transport carrier
- Be sure to have handy the phone numbers of your veterinarian, the national animal poison control hotline (888.426.4235), and a 24-hour emergency veterinary hospital in the area where you will be visiting.
- Your pet should be wearing an ID tag (which should be labeled with your name, home address and phone number) in addition to a travel tag or collar with information on where you are staying while away from home, so you can be contacted while still in the area.
- Perform a daily “health check” on your pet when away from home. Contact your veterinarian or a local veterinarian if you are concerned about any physical or behavioral changes.

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