Pet first aid



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# Pet first aid

*When it comes to medical treatment, seconds and minutes can sometimes make a big difference to a dog's recovery.*

Think of all the activities your dog does every day, all the places they stick their nose, all the surfaces they run around on, and all the living and inanimate objects they touch (or lick). When you've added them all up, it's easy to see why dogs can need first aid.

But do you know what to do if those occasions arise? When it comes to medical treatment, seconds and minutes can sometimes make a big difference to a dog's recovery, so take a few minutes now to brush up on your canine first aid.

Here are a few vet-approved tips to help stabilise and care for your pet while you seek veterinary attention.

## Know your dog's vital signs

This is a good place to begin because you need to know what's considered 'normal' if you're to diagnose something as 'abnormal.'

Normal temperature: 38° - 39°C

Normal heart rate: 70-160 beats/min
Normal breathing rate: 10–30 breaths/min

## To check vital signs:

- Don't assume your dog won't bite (especially if they're in pain).
- Use rectal, not oral, thermometers. Newer human digital thermometers are best.
- Check your dog's heart rate by placing your hand over their chest, just behind their elbow.
- Measure your dog's breathing rate by observing your dog's sides or by holding your wet finger in front of the nose.
- Measure both rates for 15 seconds and multiply by 4 to get the rate per minute.

Here are some common situations/conditions that require first aid, and how to perform the procedures:

## Bleeding

**Possible causes:** Car accident, animal fight, fall, clotting problem, rat poisoning, severe wound.

**What to do:** Bleeding from an artery is an immediately life-threatening situation. Arterial blood is bright red, bleeds in spurts, is difficult to stop, and requires immediate veterinary attention.

- For any type of external bleeding, place a clean cloth or sterile gauze over the injured area.
- Apply direct pressure for at least 5–7 minutes to stop bleeding.
- Do not apply a tourniquet unless absolutely necessary.
- Keep your dog warm by wrapping them in a blanket and take them to a vet immediately.

## Vomiting

**Possible causes:** Poisoning, abdominal injury, motion sickness, disease, overeating, fear, brain injury, parasites.

**What to do:** Examine vomit for blood or other clues as to the cause. Also, bring a sample of the vomit to your veterinarian when you take your dog for an evaluation. If your pet may have eaten something poisonous, bring a sample of the suspected poison (preferably in its original packaging) to the veterinarian.

- Do not offer any food or water until a veterinarian has been contacted.

- Abdominal pain, enlarged stomach, and dry heaves are serious signs. Call your veterinarian immediately.

## Heatstroke

**Possible causes:** Excessive heat and/or lack of shade, heavy exertion, lack of water (Note: Animals differ in how much heat they can tolerate; even mildly warm, humid temperatures can stress some pets).

**What to do:** Place your dog in a cool or shaded area and immediately begin to cool them down - but do this slowly. Don't apply ice packs to the dog. The technique you choose will depend on the size of the dog and availability of items, here are some options:

- Bathe or gently hose with cool water. Do not leave your pet unattended while soaking them in the bath.
- Soak a towel in cool water, drizzle the water over your dog, focusing on the head, stomach, under the neck, inner thighs and pads of the feet.
- Wrap the dog in a cool, wet towel.
- Monitor their rectal temperature. You can dry them when their temperature drops to 39°. Do not allow your dog to become excessively chilled (wrap them in a dry towel or blanket). Continue checking their temperature and take them to the vet for further treatment. Take them to a vet immediately if their temperature is 40°C or above.

## Limping

**Possible causes:** Broken limb or toe, arthritis, injury to footpad, dislocation, sprain, muscle soreness or a burr between their toes.

**What to do:** If a fracture is suspected, gently stabilise the limb before you transport the dog to the vet. (See 'Handling and transporting tips' below.) Cover any wounds with a clean cloth.

## Bee or wasp sting

For bee stings, apply a paste of baking soda and water. For wasp stings, apply vinegar or lemon juice. Also, apply a cold pack and follow up with calamine or antihistamine cream. In case of severe swelling or difficulty breathing, immediately take your dog to the vet.

## Choking

**Possible causes:** Foreign object—such as a needle, bone, food, or part of a plant—lodged in the throat, windpipe or teeth; choking could also be caused by an allergic reaction.

**What to do:** This is an emergency, so transport your pet to a vet immediately. On the way you could:

- Gently pull the dog's tongue forward and inspect their mouth and throat—but be careful! You must make sure your dog doesn't try to bite you. Stop if they are not cooperative.
- If you see a foreign object, hold the mouth open and attempt to remove it by hand, or with tweezers or small pliers.
- Take care not to push the object farther down the throat. Again, stop if the dog is not cooperative and immediately take them to a vet. If the dog is not breathing, see 'CPR' below.

# Unconsciousness

**Possible causes**: Drowning, electrocution, trauma, drug ingestion.

**What to do:** Take the dog to a vet as soon as possible.

- In case of drowning, remove fluid from the dog's lungs by lifting his hindquarters high over his head and squeezing his chest firmly until fluid stops coming out.
- In case of electrical shock, DO NOT touch pet until they are no longer in contact with the electricity source.
- If an object is blocking the dog's windpipe, it will need to be gently removed. See 'Choking' above. Take the dog to a vet as soon as possible.

If the dog is not breathing and has no heartbeat, start CPR.

# CPR

**NOTE:** If possible, have someone transport you and your dog to a vet while you perform the CPR procedure described below. Remove any objects from the windpipe if present: open the dog's mouth, pull the tongue forward, extend the neck, and sweep the mouth with your finger. Be careful: make sure your dog won't try to bite you.

**1. Check for breathing and a heartbeat:**

- Check to see if the dog is breathing and check for the presence of a heartbeat.
- If you don't see your dog’s chest moving and can't find a heartbeat, begin CPR with chest compressions.

**2. Give chest compressions:**

Place your hands on your dog as follows:

- For small dogs and deep chested dogs, place the heel of one of your hands directly over the pet’s heart and place your other hand directly over the first hand.
- For deep chested dogs, place the heel of one hand over the widest part of the chest and place your other hand directly over the first hand.
- For barrel chested dogs, place the dog on their back, place one hand over the widest part of the sternum, and place your other hand directly over the first hand. Lock your elbows and make sure your shoulders are directly above your hands.
- Then, push hard and push fast at a rate of 2 compressions per second, compressing 1/3 to 1/2 the width of your pet’s chest. Make sure the chest fully recoils before compressing again.
- Perform 30 chest compressions.

**3. Then give artificial breaths:**

- Gently close the dog’s mouth and extend their neck to open the airway.
- Cover your pet’s nose with your mouth and exhale until you see their chest rise.
- Give a second artificial breath.

**4. Continue CPR:**

- Continue giving CPR with a cycle of 30 chest compressions and 2 artificial breaths until your dog begins breathing again on their own.

**5. Check again for breathing and a heartbeat:**

- Briefly check for breathing and a heartbeat every 2 minutes.
- Monitor the dog for signs of life (consciousness, response, movement, breathing) regularly.

**6. Get to a vet:**

- Continue CPR until you reach a veterinary hospital.

# Handling and transporting tips

Don't try to comfort an injured dog by hugging them, and never put your face near their head. If necessary, muzzle the dog with gauze, soft towel strips, or stockings. Remember that even the most placid dog, if in pain, may bite.

Don't attempt to lift or drag a large, injured dog. Instead, improvise a stretcher with a board, throw rug, blanket, child's toboggan, etc.

Before transport, try to stabilise injuries. Rolled magazines or newspapers can serve as

splints. Pad the limb and splint generously with rolled cotton and gauze, or improvise with pillows, strips of blanket, towels, etc.

## Helpful items to have on hand

- Gauze pads, gauze rolls, rolled cotton, and veterinary self-adhesive elastic wrap
- Calamine lotion and petroleum jelly
- Thermometer
- Blunt-end scissors (to cut bandages or cut fur away from a wound)
- Tweezers and pliers
- Antibiotic cream and antiseptic solution
- Extra blankets, towels, and pillows
- Eyedropper
- Tube socks (for slipping over an injured paw)
- Transport aids, like crates and carryalls. A child's plastic toboggan or flat piece of board can be used to carry a larger dog.
- Cotton swab sticks

A few important things to remember: First aid is often just that, the aid you do first, before taking the injured dog to a veterinarian for more extensive treatment. We also recommend that you print out this information and keep it handy (just in case, hopefully you will never need it).

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