

Pet First Aid

Preparing for a medical emergency involving your pet is always best accomplished before the event takes place.

The first step in any first aid attempt is proper assessment. Knowing the whole story can make all the difference. Initially you should check your pet's vital signs, look over the body, as well as their environment for any abnormalities. You need to be a detective to determine what maybe causing a problem.

So to get started checking your pet's vital signs.

1. Breathing-respiratory rate- in out is one breath, abnormal sounds-choking, noisy breathing, laboured breathing. rapid breathing. Normal can vary with activity but normally is 10-30 /min
2. Heart rate-feel the chest where the elbow meets the chest wall on the left side, feel for a pulse on the middle of inner thigh. Normal HR 80-120 bpm in large breed or 80-140 bpm in a small breed
3. gum colour- should be bubble gum pink. Bright red, very pale pink to white or bluish are all abnormal and should be considered an emergency.
4. Temperature. Normal 38-39C-Does your pet feel hot (Hyperthermia, fever) Do you have a rectal thermometer and feel you could take your pet's temperature.
5. Ability to walk- Is your pet able to walk normally-limping, stumbling, walking as if they are drunk-Ataxic.
6. Mentation- Is your pet seem aware, conscious of you and the surroundings.

Next check your pet's body -Never move them initially if unconscious or unable to move.

1. for any injuries, lacerations, fractures, bleeding
2. punctures, foreign objects, quills
3. signs of vomiting or diarrhea
4. Seizures-paddling, salivation or loss of feces

Check the surroundings environment

- Vomit, diarrhea, toxic substances, chewed on plant material, mushrooms

Transporting the injured pet

Try to make your pet comfortable and encourage them to lie down and stay to prevent any further damage to injured tissue or further internal bleeding. If possible have them lie on their side except if they have more difficulty breathing or strongly resent it. Transport small dogs and cats in a carrier. If possible to minimize movement gently tie or tape your pet to a flat surface such as a large piece of board of plywood/ironing board/collapsed cardboard/table leaf. This is especially important in patients where if they are unconscious or a back injury is suspected to ensure they do not thrash around. This could potentially make spinal or internal injuries worse. If they struggle too much then consider using a large blanket as a stretcher. Try to keep the back and neck straight in alignment. Improper flexing of the head can cause decreased blood drainage from the brain and cause damage. If however your pet appears to have vomited and may continue to do so then you should put the head down below the

level of the heart. This will allow the vomit to drain out of the mouth and not down the windpipe and the lungs. To get your pet safely on to your mode of transport grasp the skin over the back of the neck and over the small of the back and gently slide them on to the support.

Do not put pressure on the stomach -this can affect breathing and encourage vomiting.

Cover them with a blanket-this will have a calming effect and prevent heat loss.

Make sure you have contacted the emergency clinic or veterinary clinic ahead of time to let them know you are coming. Some clinic may be closed or not have a veterinarian on premises yet. Often time is of the essence so make sure not to waste time in a crisis by having numbers and addresses available ahead of time.

Wounds/Bleeding/Bandaging:

If your pet has suffered from a traumatic incident that has created a wound, sometimes the bleeding can be substantial enough to cause enough blood loss to cause shock. A loss of 2 tsp per pound of body weight may cause shock. This can be detected by a doctor when your pet has a high heart rate and low blood pressure. Therefore if you can try to control bleeding even during transport to a vet clinic it may prevent further problems

Always remember if painful your pet may be unusually aggressive. Always protect yourself from being bitten by using a muzzle, or heavy towel to gently restrain your pet. A muzzle can be a pair of nylons/piece of soft fabric tied around the muzzle and then behind the neck

Technique to stop external bleeding:

- stop bleeding by direct pressure over the wound using a clean cloth, feminine sanitary product or gauze. This will absorb the blood and allow it to clot. Do not disturb the clots after they have formed. If the blood soaks through, do not remove the pad; simply add additional layers of cloth and continue the direct pressure more evenly. The compress can be bound using loosely applied bandage material, which then frees the hands up for emergency actions. If you do not have a compress you can use your bare hands of finger.
- if the wound is on the leg elevate the limb so the wound is above the heart level. This will reduce the blood pressure in the injured area and slow bleeding. Still maintain direct pressure with a compress.
- If external bleeding continues after you have direct pressure and elevation use your finger or thumb to place pressure over the main artery to the wound. Apply pressure to the femoral artery in the groin for severe bleeding of a rear leg (inside of thigh). or brachial artery in inside of upper arm or caudal artery at base of tail if wound on the tail
- Tourniquet -Last resort . Only if feel is life saving measure in a limb not expected to save because often result in disability or amputation. Wrap cloth around limb twice and tie it into a knot then tie a short stick or similar object into knot and twist to tighten until bleeding stops - Loosen every 20 min for 15 sec then re tighten.

Bandaging a wound when bleeding is not severe:

Bandaging the area protects it from the environment and discourages your pet from licking. Licking is never good for any wounds. Proper preparation of the wound and application of the bandage is important . A bandage that is too tight can restrict blood flow and too loose fall off

First clean the wound of all blood dirt and debris with antiseptic skin cleanser and water or just water if soap not available..Trim hair away from wound so it doesn't lie into wound being careful not to cut the skin.

Bandaging technique: Demonstrate

First in an ideal setting you should have a contact layer and absorbent layer and an outer layer.-

(Show: Antibiotic ointment, telfa non-adherent pad, cotton wrap and Vetrap)

1. First layer: after cleanse wound rinse well and dry area around, apply antibiotic ointment (neosporin/polysporin) to the contact layer and place to cover wound - Telfa non-adherent pad can get at most pharmacies.
2. Second layer: Apply the second absorbent layer (cotton roll) to hold contact layer in place snugly but not tightly over wound. 1 inch roll for small limbs and tail, 2 inch for medium sized dogs and 3-4 inch for large dogs and body. If the wound is on the leg or tail wrap from foot up or tail tip up. If you wrap in the other direction it is more likely to restrict blood flow and cause swelling. Apply 1-2 layers to cover, absorb and protect.
3. Outer layer: Use a vetrap or porous Elastikon. Wrap from toes towards body - smooth and snug but not tight. It helps to unwrap vetrap first and then rewind to remove tension from the wrap before placing.

Check bandage frequently for signs of swelling, skin discoloration, coolness, odour or saturation of bandage material. Bandage should be changed whenever any of the above are noticed or if your pet appears suddenly uncomfortable. Bandages should be kept dry with a thick plastic bag when out side.

Fractures:

- Before treatment make sure your pet again is unable to bite you. Muzzle your pet. They are in pain and may try to bite
- Stop bleeding with direct pressure
- Cover open wounds if present with sterile gauze, clean cloth or feminine napkin
- immobilize your pet if possible on a board for transport or if able to walk support your pet with a towel under belly with end held together over back like a sling
- If necessary you can use a rolled up magazine or smooth stick and support to joint above and below fracture ie wrist to elbow or ankle to knee. Wrap towel around, then place wrapped up magazine or smooth stick and tape above and below fracture never on fracture. Thigh or femur fracture are too high to splint. Only lower legs can have a temporary splint to decrease pain.
- Do not flush open wounds or apply ointment because can risk driving contaminants in deeper.
- never try to reduce fracture or push a protruding bone back into position
- Do not give over the counter pain medications unless directed by a veterinarian