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## Being prepared in an emergency



You've just clipped Rover's nail too short and now it's bleeding - QUICK - what do you do? Being prepared for emergencies can help save your pet's life. If you're struck by a moment of panic when something happens to your pet and you're not sure what to do, the following advice from Dr. Gretchen Schoeffler, Chief of Emergency and Critical Care at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine, may help.

While most injuries should still be looked at by your veterinarian, providing your pet with first aid can increase the chances of speedy recovery. Dr. Schoeffler stresses that one of the most important things you can do is to make sure that you have readily available your pet's health records and the contact information for your regular veterinarian, an emergency veterinarian to use during off-hours, and an animal poison control hotline. Also, everyone should have a pet first aid kit on hand. This kit may contain many of the same things as your family's first aid kit. For instance, Dr. Schoeffler recommends the following:

### Pet first-aid kit contents

Hydrogen peroxide (3% solution) - to induce vomiting, administer only under direction of veterinarian (stay away from syrup of ipecac unless your veterinarian recommends it).

- Styptic powder or sticks - for toenails that you have over-clipped. It is especially important for minimizing blood loss in birds because even small amounts of blood loss in birds can be fatal.
- Clean towels or bandages - for a temporary fix to stop blood and keep area clean. Dr. Schoeffler cautions against using stretchy material such as ace bandages, which can cut off circulation if wrapped too tightly.
- Neosporin ointment - for scrapes, to be used under the direction of a vet.
- Backboard, wood, door, blanket - to act as a temporary stretcher to transport your pet to a car.
- Scissors - for cutting bandages to size.
- Tweezers - to remove a tick.
- Eyewash (like contact wearers use) - if something gets into your pet's eye, this can be used to flush it out.
- Thermometer - you should have a dedicated thermometer for your pets and either KY jelly or plain petroleum to ease taking a rectal temperature.
- Plain diphenhydramine tablets (Benadryl) - can be used in dogs that have an allergic reaction, but should only be used as directed by your veterinarian.
- Muzzle - to minimize the risk of being bitten while trying to help an animal that's in pain.
- Pet carrier - to make sure your pet is safely restrained for transport to the vet.

### How do I know when I should immediately take my pet to the veterinarian?

According to Dr. Schoeffler, there are some times when pet owners should immediately seek their veterinarian's help.

- **Consider your pet's behavior** - Is it acting out of character? A dog that's normally very bright eyed, active, and alert, but suddenly becomes lethargic should be checked.
- **Consider the severity of the problem** - if your pet is suffering from a bite wound, blunt trauma, burns, its heart has stopped, its breathing has stopped, it has collapsed (even if it recovered), or it is choking, you should immediately seek veterinary services.

### How do I handle my pet who has just been hurt and is in pain?

"Be very careful around pets that have just suffered trauma and are in shock," warns Dr. Schoeffler. Pets that are normally very loving may bite out of fear or pain. When readying your pet for transport to the vet, any movement may cause it further pain, and you should muzzle it to minimize the risk of being bitten. You can use a standard muzzle or fashion one out of a clean towel or gauze bandages.

### Poison

#### Common household items that may be toxic for your pet according to Dr. Schoeffler

- Anti-freeze - actually it's the ethylene glycol that is toxic and usually fatal to all pets if not treated immediately. Some anti-freezes have less toxic substances in them.
- Avocado - toxic to birds
- Chocolate - toxic to dogs and cats
- Coffee - toxic to dogs and cats
- Garlic - toxic to cats (cats are more sensitive to it than dogs)
- Grapes - toxic and potentially fatal in dogs (unknown in cats)
- Lilies - toxic to cats (unknown in dogs)
- Naprosyn (anti-inflammatory drug) - toxic to dogs and cats
- Onions - toxic to cats (who are more sensitive to it than dogs)
- Pennies minted after 1984 - toxic and potentially fatal in dogs and cats due to the high levels of zinc contained within them
- Potpourri oils/essential oils - toxic to dogs and cats
- Tylenol - toxic and potentially fatal in cats (dogs may tolerate low doses but cats are more sensitive)
- Raisins - toxic in dogs (unknown in cats)
- Xylitol - toxic in dogs (unknown in cats)

### Bleeding

According to Dr. Schoeffler, if the amount of blood loss is small, you should be able to take care of it on your own by applying direct pressure to the area with a clean towel for 15 minutes. If the animal is bleeding profusely, you should do the same, but immediately get your pet to the vet, as severe bleeding can be fatal. Many pet owners, especially dog owners clip their pet's nails. If you cut into the quick, it will cause the nail to start bleeding. Make sure you have a styptic stick or powder nearby to apply directly to where it is bleeding. The nail should stop bleeding within five minutes on its own.

### Breathing Difficulty

Any animal exhibiting distress or difficulty breathing should be assessed by a veterinarian **as soon as possible**. Difficulty breathing is different from noisy breathing. Brachycephalic breeds (animals with short noses - Bull Dog, Pug, Boston Terrier, Persian cat, etc.) commonly have compressed narrow air passages and long, soft palates which predispose them to breathing problems. Classically, these patients will have noisy or open-mouth breathing, snoring, panting, and exercise intolerance. Environmental factors such as stress, exercise, or extreme temperatures, and some types of systemic disease can intensify the signs associated with this syndrome. Dr. Schoeffler cautions that if you have a brachycephalic breed and they exhibit noisier breathing than is typical or have any exercise intolerance, do not push them. Minimize stress and exercise and move them to a cool room. If their signs improve, you may be able to wait and talk to your veterinarian about the problem at your earliest convenience; if however, their signs escalate or they show any signs of distress, seek emergency care immediately. Some long-term management options include exercise restriction (especially when it is hot), obesity prevention, and elimination of stress. Treatment of severe cases or a crisis situation may involve hospitalization, oxygen therapy, medications, assistance breathing, and ultimately surgery.

### Seizures

When your pet is having a seizure, don't try to help it, other than making sure that there aren't any objects nearby that could hurt the pet. Time the length of the seizure and take notes of what you're seeing so that you can describe the seizure to your vet.

With pet first aid, you might just be able to save your pet's life. Dr. Schoeffler advises, "When in doubt, consult with your veterinarian. You know your pet best. If something doesn't seem right and you're concerned, get it checked out."