



Caring For Your Pet in an Emergency

West Chelsea Veterinary shares basic first aid tips for pet parents



As pet parents, we worry about the safety of our furry friends. We educate ourselves on the potential dangers hidden within our homes and neighborhoods, pet-proof our living quarters and inspect the labels of the food we give our dogs and cats.

But would you know what to do in the case of an emergency? An increasing number of pet owners are becoming trained in pet first aid, learning the lifesaving steps to take in case of emergencies such as poisoning, heat stroke, choking or bleeding.

"We want to caution pet owners that there is no substitute for the medical care of a trained veterinarian, however, knowing the basics in pet first aid can make a difference to your pet's outcome in the case of an emergency," says Dr. Michael Farber, DVM and co-chief of staff at West Chelsea Veterinary.

Poisoning

Poisoning is a serious threat for cats and dogs. If your pet's skin or eyes have been exposed to a toxic product, check the product label for instructions. This may include washing your pet's skin with mild soap and water or flushing the eyes with an eye wash solution. Make sure to call a veterinarian immediately for further instruction.

If your pet has consumed a harmful product, phone the Animal Poison Control Center at 1-888-426-4435 (there is a fee for the consultation) as well as your veterinarian. Have as many details as possible ready, such as species, breed, age, sex, weight, symptoms, description of the substance your pet was exposed to and length of exposure. Try to have the product container available for reference.

Excessive overheating / At risk for Heatstroke

One of the most common problems a pet may face in warmer weather is heat stroke. When exposed to extremely hot temperatures outside or in a car, a dog can quickly become overheated and suffer from heat stroke. Signs of heat stroke may include heavy panting and being unable to calm down (even when lying down), fast pulse rate or the inability to get up.

If you suspect your pet may have heat stroke, you may consider taking his or her temperature rectally. If the temperature is above 105 degrees Fahrenheit, try to cool the animal down with a water hose (if available) or with a cold, wet towel around its neck and head (do not cover your pet's eyes, nose or mouth) and bring your pet immediately to the veterinarian. Heat stroke has the ability to lead to severe organ dysfunction and damage if not treated immediately.

Choking

Choking requires the immediate attention of a veterinarian. If you notice your pet having difficulty breathing, excessively pawing at the mouth or making choking sounds when breathing or coughing, call your veterinarian immediately.

If the foreign object is visible when looking in your pet's mouth, you may gently try to remove it, but always use caution – a choking pet may try to bite you in its panic. Take your pet to the veterinarian immediately for emergency care. Choking is one of the more common emergencies addressed in pet first aid courses (see side bar).

Wounds

If your pet is wounded and is bleeding, first call your veterinarian for assistance. Sometimes a superficial wound, such as a small cut to the paw or nail, can produce a lot of blood, but can be treated at home. If your pet is severely bleeding from a deep cut, cover the wound with thick gauze, holding pressure for a minimum of three minutes and take your pet to the veterinarian immediately.



PACKING YOUR PET FIRST AID KIT

When preparing a first aid kit for your pet, consider these items*:

- Emergency numbers including your local emergency veterinary clinic and Animal Poison Control Center
- Gauze for wrapping wounds or muzzling an injured animal
- Nonstick bandages or strips of clean cloth to control bleeding (never use human adhesive bandages on pets!)
- Digital thermometer (always take your pet's temperature rectally)
- Eye dropper to give oral treatments or flush wounds

* Consult your West Chelsea veterinarian on the best items to have on hand for your cat or dog.

Want to Learn More?

A number of different organizations in New York City offer courses in pet first aid:

American Red Cross: www.nyredcross.org

92nd Street Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association: www.92y.org

Pet Tech: www.pettech.net

