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Emergency Home Care

Recognize the Signs
Do the Right Things First

Every loving pet owner is a highly emotional being-especially during times of crisis or perceived crisis. None of us can be truly detached and objective when our dog or cat is in trouble. If we're lucky, the apparent emergency will turn out to be little more than our fears running wild. One basic rule: **When in doubt call the doctor and ask for advice.** If you don't have a veterinarian whom you would feel comfortable calling for help, I advise you to turn now to the page in this website: *Choosing a Veterinarian*. It's best to have this relationship in place before you have an urgent need for it.

ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center: 1-888-426-4435

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Abscesses

Causes:

- Penetrating wounds resulting from:
 - Cat fights and dog bites.
 - Stab type wounds from sharp wire or other contaminated, pointed objects.
 - Bacteria gets deposited deep beneath the skin at the time of injury:
 - The wound at the surface of the skin is narrow and quickly seals and begins to heal.
 - The body's defense system tries to eliminate the bacteria but gets overwhelmed.
 - Pus forms as white blood cells die in the immune system's failed attempts to resolve the infection.
 - The skin over the original wound swells as the area beneath it accumulates pus.

Signs:

- The resulting abscess will likely be warm and painful to the touch.
- Your pet may have a fever over 103 F.
- If the abscess has been swelling for more than one day, your pet may become lethargic and fail to eat.
- Neglected abscesses may cause vomiting, dehydration, and death.
- Some pets may chew or claw an abscess open.
 - Pus draining from an open wound may be the first noticeable sign.
 - Your pet may feel better after drainage begins.
 - If the abscess is not treated by a veterinarian soon, the dried pus that becomes stuck to the wound may seal it closed. This will allow the abscess to refill with pus. Your pet will then become ill all over again.

Things to do:

- Take the pet's rectal temperature. Any temperature over 103.0 F suggests an infection.
- Clean any drainage using a moist washcloth.
- Wear rubber gloves and wash your hands when finished.
- Take that pet to your veterinarian. All abscesses are potentially dangerous. If your pet is feeling well, waiting a few hours is OK. Waiting a day is not OK.

Things NOT to do:

- Don't handle the abscess at all if you live in an area known to have cases of plague.
- Don't use Hydrogen Peroxide. While it will do a good job of breaking down the discharge, it can damage the tissue. It can also release oxygen into the blood. This can be fatal.
- Don't try to lance the abscess. While important, it will also be necessary to lance it in a way that will allow continuous drainage. This must be done by a veterinarian. Some abscesses need to have a latex drain installed. The doctor will also irrigate the interior of the abscess to prevent re-infection.

Follow-up:

- The doctor may need to sedate or anesthetize your pet to prevent struggling. Abscesses can be painful. Treatment can hurt even worse.
- Antibiotics will be needed by injection. This will be followed by oral medication for use at home.
- Pets who get frequent abscesses (for instance, cats who fight often) are at high risk of kidney failure because bacterial byproducts are repeatedly released into the blood.

Appetite-Poor Appetite or No Appetite

Causes:

- Loss of appetite is an important but vague symptom that can be caused by nearly any problem including:
 - Stomach or intestinal upset.
 - Foreign material in the stomach or intestine. Pets who swallow toys and other junk do not always attempt to vomit.
 - Heart or lung disease.
 - Kidney or liver disease.
 - Pain or injury.
 - Diseases of the nervous system.
 - Nearly anything.
- What are *not* causes of poor appetite:
 - Tired of the food.
 - A pet who is just trying to get your attention.
 - “Just not hungry”.

Signs:

- Suddenly no longer eating.
- Gradual appetite loss.
- Intermittently good, then poor, appetite
- Additional symptoms sometimes seen with appetite loss:
 - Lethargy and weight loss
 - Vomiting and/or diarrhea
 - Excessive drinking/urinating

Things to do:

- If the pet seems fine in all other ways (poor appetite is the only problem), you can “wait and see” for 24 hours. If the appetite has not returned in one day, your pet may be truly ill. Take your pet to see the doctor.
- Observe your pet and your home and yard carefully for *any* other symptoms such as those listed above. Since poor appetite can be a part of nearly any health problem, look for anything out of the ordinary. Your pet will not answer his or her doctor’s questions. Your veterinarian will rely heavily on you for information.
- If you have doubt about your decision to monitor your pet instead of getting a physical exam, call your veterinarian and ask.

Things NOT to do :

- Don’t try to offer your pet a variety of tasty pet food substitutes. You will want to know if your dog’s or cat’s appetite for pet food returns. You may never learn whether the appetite loss is a real problem if your pet develops the habit of holding out for the yummy stuff. An apparently poor appetite may just be a sign that your pet is training you. Dogs and cats are clever.
- Don’t give aspirin or other medications. By “playing doctor” you might mask other important symptoms. You could also worsen an upset stomach.

Follow-up:

- If your pet starts eating again within one day, keep watching carefully. The problem may repeat. An appetite that comes and goes can be an important sign of a smoldering disease. If your pet refuses food again, get an exam.
- Depending on your pet’s physical exam, your veterinarian may recommend a variety of lab tests. Encourage the doctor to be thorough. Whatever the problem, a complete diagnosis will be essential to treat that pet right.

Bleeding-Without Injury

Causes:

- Poisoning with D-Con or other rat and mouse poisons cause bleeding from anywhere in the body.
- Congestive heart failure, other lung diseases, and severe dental disease can cause bleeding from the mouth
- Diseases of the normal blood-clotting mechanisms of the body. Some of these diseases are hereditary.
- Severe infections of the stomach and/or intestines such as parvovirus in dogs, which can cause blood in the vomit and/or in the diarrhea.
- Disease of the prostate or bladder in the male can cause blood in the urine or bleeding from the penis.
- Disease of the uterus or vagina in the female can cause vaginal bleeding.
- Some cancers and chemotherapies
- Daily aspirin use.
- Ehrlichiosis- a blood parasite carried by ticks.

Signs:

- Bleeding from any normal body opening such as:
 - Mouth, nose, penis, vagina, anus, ears, eyes
- Weakness, depression, sometimes vomiting.
- Difficulty breathing
- Excessive bleeding from a minor wound, bruising.

Things to do:

- Take a bleeding pet to a veterinarian ASAP. Any external bleeding may represent only a fraction of the blood loss that may be occurring internally.
- Handle the pet gently. Excessive activity will increase bleeding.
- If a dog or cat is known to have eaten rodent poison or if your pet has been given aspirin or ibuprofen, induce vomiting even as much as 12 hours after ingestion. Do this only if the pet is fully alert and conscious. Pets in a state of depression or coma can vomit and then inhale the vomitus, causing suffocation.
- If the bleeding is spurting bright red blood, see the section on: **Injuries-Severe**.
- If there is vomiting and diarrhea with blood, see the section on: **Vomiting and Diarrhea-Severe**.

Things NOT to do:

- Don't induce more vomiting in a pet who has already vomited.
- Never give a cat *any* household medications.
- Don't give aspirin or ibuprofen to a bleeding pet. This will worsen the bleeding.
- Don't wait too long. Normally, bleeding lasts two or three minutes before normal blood clotting begins. If active bleeding lasts longer than this, you have a true emergency.

Follow-up:

- If initial blood tests show significant blood loss, a transfusion may be necessary.
- If poisoning is suspected, the pet's stomach may need to be rinsed out. Activated charcoal will then be put into the stomach by tube.
- If the cause of the bleeding is not clear, a series of tests will be needed. Managing the emergency needs of the pet is the first concern. Preventing further crises is the next priority.
- Cancers and diseases of the urinary tract, prostate, or uterus may require surgery.

Cold, Sluggish, Trembling, Shivering (hypothermia)

Causes:

- Exposure to cold, often wet weather.
- Leaving a pet unsheltered.
- Sick pets, infant puppies and kittens, and injured pets who need more protection from loss of body heat are at increased risk.

Signs:

- Rectal temperature below 99.0 degrees F
- Severe lethargy, inactivity. Weak, slow pulse. Slow rate of breathing.
- Shivering in pets with temperatures of 90.0-99.0 F. No shivering under 90.0 F.

Things to do:

- Act quickly and decisively.
- If the rectal temperature is 97.0 F – 99.0 F, increase the room temperature and cover with blankets. Provide drinking water.
- If the rectal temperature is 90.0 F – 97.0 F, put hot water bottles next to your pet, use a hair drier set on low, cover with blankets, and get your pet to the doctor.
- If the rectal temperature is less than 90.0 F, get to the nearest veterinarian fast. Try to call on the way. Cover the pet and use hot water bottles -- but move quickly.

Things NOT to do:

- Don't be conservative and wait.

Follow-up:

- Take your pet to the veterinarian soon--even if he/she seems to get over it quickly. There may be an important physical reason why it happened in the first place.

Coma-Unconsciousness

Causes:

- Failure to breathe properly.
- Failure of the heart to pump blood normally. This includes cardiac arrest (a stopped heart).
- Head injury or other brain disease.
- Severe blood loss
- Very low blood pressure, which can occur with shock. Severe injuries such as being hit by a car cause shock and coma.
- Low blood sugar
 - Poorly managed diabetes
 - Puppies or kittens who have gone several hours without eating.
- Drug overdoses – such as an overdose of certain heart medications.
- Rare cases: cancers, some liver diseases, blood clots to the brain.
- Anything resulting in a lack of oxygen or inadequate amounts of blood sugar to the brain.

Signs:

- A pet in a coma is alive but unconscious.
- The pet responds to neither sound, movement, nor light.
- There is no response to pain. (If you squeeze the toe of a pet who's in a coma, he/she won't respond.)
- The pet will not try to stand.
- The pet may or may not be breathing.
- There may or not be a pulse or heartbeat.

- The pet's gums and tongue are:
 - Purple or purplish blue, which is an indication that there isn't enough oxygen in the blood. Getting the pet to breathe should help.
 - Pale or gray, indicating that there isn't enough blood and oxygen reaching the brain. This will occur if the heart has stopped or if there is severe shock or blood loss.
 - Normal pink. Pink/red gums mean that breathing as well as blood and oxygen flow are good. Coma, in this case, may be due to a brain disease or brain injury.

Things to do:

- Act immediately and decisively. This may be your pet's only chance.
- Straighten the neck to allow air to pass into the lungs.
- Handle the pet gently in cases of injury. Keep the pet flat on a board. If injury to the neck or back has occurred, rough handling could make the problem worse.
- If your pet is diabetic, rub honey or Karo syrup on the gums. (A young kitten or puppy in a coma may respond well to this treatment, too.) This will get sugar to the bloodstream quickly. Pets who are comatose due to low blood sugar may improve in minutes.

CPR (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation) using 2 People:

- In cases of **No Breathing** (gums are **purple/blue**):
 1. Open the mouth and remove any foreign material that may be blocking air movement.
 2. Lay the pet on his/her side.
 3. Hold the muzzle/mouth closed and put the entire nose in your mouth.
 4. Blow hard enough to cause the chest to expand at a rate of 80-120 times per minute. This means **1 ½ to 2 times per second**.
 5. Continue until the color of the gums returns to pink.
- If the pet's gums are still purple/blue in 90 seconds or in cases of **No Breathing** with gums that are **pale/gray**, start chest compressions in addition to breathing.
 1. While the breather continues at the same rate of **1 ½ to 2 times per second**, the other person places the heel of one hand on the side of the pet's chest. The correct spot for the hands is the place where the point of the elbow would be when the front leg is pulled up next to the chest. After finding that spot, move the front leg away. Place the heel of the other hand on top of the first hand so that you can push down using the heels of both hands together--that is, one hand on top of the other.
 2. The person doing chest compressions pushes hard on the chest using a quick thrust at a rate of 80-120 times per minute. That means pushing hard on the side of the chest at the same rate as the breather: **1 ½ to 2 times per second**.
 3. The breather blows into the nose as the chest compression person raises his/her hands between pushes.
So it goes like this:
 - **Push-breathe-push-breathe-push-breathe.....**
 4. Continue until the color of the gums returns to pink.
 5. If the gums are still purple/blue or pale/gray after 10 minutes, stop and wait to see if the pet will breathe voluntarily.

Failure to revive a pet in 10 minutes indicates a failed attempt. This is a dead pet. In these cases, I am very sorry. You did your best. Try to accept that some lives were meant to go their maker.

Things NOT to do:

- You shouldn't stop CPR to load the pet into the car for the trip to the emergency veterinarian. It's far better to do CPR at home right away, than it is to wait for the doctor to do it when you arrive at the animal hospital. No pet can be revived unless CPR is started immediately after breathing stops.

Follow-up:

- In cases of successful life-saving efforts, the pet will need hospitalization for further treatment. There are many systems in the body that may have been damaged during the period of poor blood and oxygen delivery.

- The causes of the cardiac and pulmonary arrest will need to be completely understood to prevent a repeat occurrence.
- Other tests will be done when you arrive at the veterinary hospital. These tests include electrocardiogram, doppler blood pressure, and pulse oximetry (measurement of the oxygen levels in the red blood cells).
- Oxygen therapy may be needed. Drugs may be needed to manage abnormal heart rhythms and fluid in the lungs.

Constipation-Straining to Pass Stool

Causes:

- **Cats:**
 - A common problem in cats over 10 years. Seems to be a part of aging for many.
 - Hairballs can be involved in this problem.
 - Occasionally seen with kidney failure.
 - Sometimes seen with dehydration due to other causes.
- **Dogs:**
 - Poultry and pork chop bones that have been chewed and swallowed.
 - Other foreign material that has been swallowed can cause constipation—such as multiple small slivers of bone from chewed beef bones. These will stick to fecal matter in the rectum and form rock-hard stools.
 - Occasional constipation can be seen with low functioning adrenal glands (Addisons disease).
 - An unneutered male dog can strain from an enlarged prostate gland.
- Constipation never “just happens”. It is never a normal occurrence in dogs and cats. There is always a deeper cause.

Signs:

- Frequent straining with *no* stool -- or very hard stools -- being passed.
- Severe, prolonged constipation will cause failure to eat and vomiting in some pets.
- Pets who have strained repeatedly may also develop rectal prolapse. This is a serious complication. A prolapsed rectum is an external protrusion of the interior of the rectum. It appears as a red swelling seen sticking out of the rectum.

Things to do:

- Look carefully on the ground or around your home for any sign of fluid stool, indicating diarrhea rather than constipation. It sounds like a contradiction, but a pet who tries and fails to pass stool may not be truly constipated. If a dog or cat has had diarrhea, the inside wall of the rectum may be inflamed and swollen. The thickened rectum sends a nerve signal to the brain indicating an interior “mass”. Thus the pet thinks that the thickened, swollen rectal tissue is stool. He or she will strain but pass nothing. If you don’t find the diarrhea that started the problem, you will believe your pet to be constipated. This is important because the treatments for vomiting and diarrhea are quite different.
- If you are sure that your pet is truly constipated, but otherwise fine, you may try to correct the problem at home.
 - Old fashioned enema bags and bottles are fine. Use warm water only. No soap. Detergents irritate the wall of the rectum and colon and cause inflammation and swelling. You can add some K-Y Jelly or other water-based lubricant.
 - Smear the nozzle with lubricant and slide it into the rectum. Release the water flow and run as much water into the rectum as you can. Continuing to run water into the rectum even as it leaks out around the nozzle is fine.
 - Repeat these enemas every 1 or 2 hours until the pet passes normal or soft stool.
- Make an appointment to have your pet examined. There is always an important reason for constipation in pets. They are not subject to “occasional irregularity” like people.

Things NOT to do:

- Don't use Fleet or other pre-packaged, phosphate containing enemas. They can be dangerous for small breed dogs. *They are fatal for cats.*
- Don't gamble. If there is any question that your pet may have problems other than simple constipation, see your veterinarian.

Follow-up:

- A thorough medical exam for constipation will include a rectal exam. This is only mildly uncomfortable. It is essential for understanding the original cause of the problem.
- Your veterinarian will want to do lab work and possibly take X-rays of the abdomen.
- Follow the doctor's advice. Constipation alone rarely kills a pet, but it could be caused by something much more serious.

Coughing or Difficulty Breathing

Causes:

- Partial or complete blockage of the airways (the windpipes in the throat, chest, and lungs).
- Pneumonia, bronchitis, asthma.
- Some head injuries.
- Severe chest injury – such as being hit by a car. This can cause bleeding into the chest, free air in the chest, or abdominal organs in the chest due to a torn diaphragm (diaphragmatic hernia).
- “Sharp” injuries such as wounds that penetrate into the inside of the chest. Gunshots, and stab wounds.
- Heart failure.
- Over heating in pushed-in faced dog breeds (Bulldogs, Pugs, etc) can lead to excessive panting which may cause coughing and breathing difficulty. This can be rapidly fatal. Sometimes minor infections
- Severe allergic reactions

Signs:

- Rapid, noisy, forced breathing.
- Lying on the chest with the neck extended.
- Weakness or exhaustion
- Gums and tongue that are purple in color.
- Coughing, choking, or harsh, fast breathing. If this goes on for more than 3 minutes, you may have an emergency situation.

Things to do:

- Open the mouth, in good light, and look for foreign material such as a toy or a large piece of food. Remove the blockage with the fingers or a pair of needle nosed pliers. Move quickly.
- If a dog or cat is having trouble with normal activities such as walking, eating, drinking or panting get your pet to the veterinarian immediately. Check the color of the gums and tongue. Call the animal hospital on your way, so that the doctor and assistants will be ready for your pet's arrival. Your pet may be facing imminent death.
- If someone nearby has an unused oxygen cylinder, hold the breathing tubes close to the pet's nose and mouth, and allow the pet to inhale the oxygen on the way to the animal hospital.
- Handle the pet gently and move your pet very slowly to prevent pain. Pain can cause struggling, which may worsen the problem.

Things NOT to do:

- Don't give any medications that have not been prescribed by your veterinarian. Avoid human over-the-counter medications such as cough syrups and cold remedies.

- Don't allow the pet to become excited. This will increase your pet's oxygen needs and worsen the problem.
- Don't apply pressure around the neck or chest. Your pet needs to breathe as easily as possible.

Follow-up:

- There are any number of tests and procedures that could be necessary to fully understand respiratory disease. A less than complete diagnostic workup can result in "educated guesswork" in attempting to arrive at the correct treatment. Be sure that you choose a competent, thorough veterinarian. For your part, don't economize. Respiratory problems are often high risk.

Delivery of Puppies and Kittens-Problems

Causes:

- A mother's birth canal that is too small to allow passage of the babies.
- A birth canal that has been injured or compressed by previous injury to the bones of the pelvis, such as a badly healed fracture from a hit-by-car injury.
- Babies who are too big to pass through.
- A uterus that lacks the strength necessary to push the babies out.
- Problems are seen most often in small dogs (especially the "pushed-in face" breeds like Pugs), large breed dogs with huge litters, and in purebred Persian and Himalayan cats.
- Older or overweight mothers are at higher risk.

Signs:

- Pregnant cats and dogs will have a normal drop in body temperature prior to the start of contractions. When her rectal temperature reaches approximately 99 degrees you should expect the first baby within 12-24 hours. Longer than 24 hours means trouble.
- If the mother pushes and strains for more than 30 minutes without delivering a baby.
- If there are more than 2 hours between the arrival of one baby and the arrival of the next baby.
- Crying, intense pain, and constant licking of the vulva. A small amount of this is normal.
- Longer than 70 days from the first breeding without signs of delivery.

Things to do:

- Allow the mother to remain relaxed and free of a noisy, crowded environment. Her normal sleeping area is best. People (especially children) hovering causes stress.
- If a baby remains at the vulva for several minutes, grasp it and pull gently with a clean, dry towel in your hand.
- After the baby is delivered, allow the mother 30 seconds to start to clean it. If she ignores it, rub the baby with a towel gently but vigorously. Rub the face and chest to stimulate breathing.
- If the above time limits are exceeded, call your veterinarian or emergency animal clinic to alert them that you are on your way. This is the time to turn the mother and litter over to the pros.

Things NOT to do:

- Don't move the planned birthing area near the delivery date. This is stressful to the mother.
- Don't Poke and prod. Allow Mother Nature to work. Eliminate commotion.
- Don't waste time. If you suspect trouble even within the above time guidelines-get help.

Follow-up:

- The veterinarian may recommend injections of the hormone oxytocin to help stimulate contractions of the uterus.
- Cesarean section may be necessary. Don't resist this suggestion. It is usually quite safe.
- Most mothers will refuse food until the entire litter has been delivered. When she finally eats, she is probably done.
- A veterinarian should examine all mothers and their litters within 24 hours of delivery-even if all seems well. Retained babies or placentas are not rare. Problems with the breasts can occur as well.

- Feed an expectant mother a high quality puppy growth diet from early pregnancy through the time of weaning. This will reduce the risk of eclampsia (convulsions due to calcium deficiency). Don't add milk.

Drowning or Near Drowning

Causes:

- Immersion of the head under water causing the pet to lose consciousness.
- Lungs that are filled with water, which means oxygen can't be transferred to the blood. (Death from drowning is most often due to brain injury from lack of oxygen.)
- Low oxygen in the brain can also cause death due to abnormal heart rhythms.
- Some pets die from drowning with very little water in their lungs. This can happen if the pet has throat spasms that close down the larynx. A pet will lose consciousness and die if he or she continues trying to suck air through a throat that is closed.

Signs:

- Coughing and spitting up water.
- Loss of consciousness.
- Vomiting.
- Seizures due to poor oxygen flow to the brain.
- A pet who is still conscious may continue to cough or choke. Even if the pet hasn't lost consciousness, he or she may get severe lung, brain, or heart damage.

Things to do:

- Hold the pet's head in a downward position to allow water to drain from the lungs. This is especially important if the pet vomits.
- Straighten the neck and pull the tongue forward through the front teeth. This will help open the airway and allow for better breathing.
- Perform **CPR**. See the section on **Coma-Unconsciousness**.
- Take the pet to the nearest veterinarian immediately following CPR.
- Do these things as quickly and decisively as possible. Your efforts are the pet's only chance.

Things NOT to do:

- Don't stop CPR to load the pet into the car for the trip to the emergency veterinarian. You are far better off doing CPR on-site than waiting for the doctor to do it when you arrive at the animal hospital. No pet can be revived unless CPR is started immediately after breathing stops.
- Don't assume that a pet who looks fine will stay fine. There may be a lag in the onset of serious near-drowning complications.

Follow-up

- Any pet who survives a near-drowning will need hospitalization for oxygen therapy, IV fluids, and treatment of possible brain injury.
- Long term lung damage maybe a permanent handicap.

Eyes

Causes/Problems:

- Injuries, lacerations, or wounds on the outer surface of the eye (the cornea).
- An eye that appears "popped-out" of the eye socket (Proptosis). This occurs most commonly in the breeds that have pushed-in faces (brachycephalic breeds) such as Pugs, Pekinese, and Boston Terriers. Proptosis can also occur in cats and other dog breeds.
- Blunt trauma. This is an eye that has been hit by an object that did not cut the eye but has bruised it badly. Severe damage to the interior of the eye can occur this way.
- Damage from caustic substances such as Mace, shampoos, or other fluids splashed on the eyes.
- Sudden Blindness-often associated with glaucoma (excessive pressure inside an eye).

- Foreign material penetrating the eye or, more often, imbedded in the tissue surrounding the eye.
- Infection/inflammation of the interior of the eye. These develop gradually but the symptoms may appear suddenly.

Signs:

- Severe squinting of the eyelids. This means eye pain.
- A dog or cat who is reluctant to open the eye in bright light.
- Severe redness of the tissues surrounding the eye.
- Redness of the pupil or iris of the eye.
- Thick pus-like eye discharge.
- Wounds to the surface of the eye.
- Sudden clouding of the surface of eyes and redness in the surrounding tissue may indicate glaucoma, especially if the pet shows signs of pain or blindness.

Things to do:

- Protect an injured eye with a lubricant. K-Y Jelly or another water-based lubricant is best, but you can also apply a petroleum jelly like Vaseline. Spread the lubricant generously right on the eyeball to prevent the eye tissues from drying.
- If eye damage occurred because fluid was splashed in the eyes, rinse the eyes with water continuously for 30 minutes or until your pet's eyes can be examined by a veterinarian.
- Have all eye injuries examined, no matter how minor the injury appears to be. The sooner, the better.
- Sudden clouding of the eye -- with or without pain -- should be examined ASAP. Your pet may have glaucoma.
- A "popped out" (proptosed) eye needs medical attention on an emergency basis. Apply K-Y Jelly or Vaseline immediately.
- Foreign material lodged in the tissue next to the eye may be removed at home if the pet will hold very still. Use your fingertips only. Instruments like tweezers are risky as eye injury can occur if your pet makes a sudden move.
 - Take that pet to your veterinarian after you remove the foreign material. While the eye may look much better, it is important for the doctor to check for damage to the cornea. The doctor will also look for more foreign material.
- Carefully clean discharges away because discharges are teeming with bacteria. Be careful not to apply pressure to the eye itself during cleaning. Clean the eye using cotton or a wash cloth moistened with tap water only. Never use Hydrogen Peroxide.

Things NOT to do:

- Don't "wait and see" with eye injuries. Damage to the interior of the eyeball can be difficult to recognize at home. Serious eye injuries can only be successfully treated if the pet is examined quickly.
- Don't try to pull out foreign material if it's imbedded in the eye itself. The doctor will do this only after he or she has assessed damage to the interior of the eye. The penetrating foreign material may be sealing a leak. If you try to remove the object at home, you may cause serious complications.
- Don't let the pet rub an injured or diseased eye.
- Don't let other pets lick the problem eye. This can worsen the damage.
- Don't try to clean the discharge away from the eye if the pet struggles. Let the medical staff manage a struggling pet.

Follow-up:

- Any eye injury can cause long term glaucoma, dry eyes, internal eye infections or inflammations, and eyelid deformity. Take your pet to the doctor for an eye exam even if you manage to solve the problem at home.
- "Popped-out" (proptosed) eyes must be surgically managed ASAP. If you wait longer than 30 minutes, the eye may have to be surgically removed.
- If the corneal surface of the eye is injured, it may need to be stitched. Other wounds on the eye's surface will need topical treatments. Some pets will need oral medications as a follow-up.
- Some eye problems result from disease in another part of the body. Your veterinarian may recommend other testing.

Fainting and Weakness

Causes:

- Heart Failure
- Shock
- Severe pain
- Head injury
- Blood loss and other causes of anemia (low number of red blood cells)
- Infections of the brain and spinal cord
- Advanced internal disease including:
 - Diabetes mellitus
 - Low blood sugar
 - Infections of the pancreas or abdomen (peritonitis)
 - Liver or other internal organ disease
 - End stage infections
- **Poisoning** (see this heading)

Signs:

- Depending on the cause some pets will be fine when resting but become unable to walk without weakness or fainting.
- Many pets with this problem will be unable to rest without fainting.

Things to do:

- Get that pet to the veterinarian immediately. Check the color of the gums and tongue. (See the section on **Coma-Unconsciousness**.) Call the animal hospital on your way, so that the doctors and staff will be ready for your pet's arrival. Your pet may be facing imminent death.
- Provide drinking water.
- On the way to the animal hospital take the rectal temperature. If the temperature is above 103.5 F or below 99.0 F, treat according to the instructions in this section on **Heat Stroke** (Hyperthermia) or **Cold and Sluggish** (Hypothermia).
- If someone nearby has an unused oxygen cylinder, hold the breathing tubes close to the pet's nose and mouth, and allow the pet to inhale on the way to the animal hospital.
- If you know your pet has diabetes, rub some honey or Karo Syrup on the gums to improve what may be low blood sugar.
- Apply firm pressure with a cloth bandage or an article of clothing to any bleeding wound
- Handle the pet gently and slowly to prevent pain. If you aggravate the pain, the pet may struggle, which could make the problem even worse.
- Act decisively. You don't have time to "wait and see."

Things NOT to do:

- Don't allow the pet to become excited. This will increase his or her oxygen needs and worsen the problem.
- Don't allow any pressure around the neck or chest. The pet needs to breathe as easily as possible.
- Don't give your pet any medications.

Follow-up:

- Be prepared for the doctor to recommend extensive diagnostic testing including ECG, X-rays, blood and urine testing, and doppler blood pressure.
- Hospitalization may be needed to stabilize your pet. Some pets need lifelong treatments following an episode of this kind.

Heat Stroke (hyperthermia)

Causes:

- Humid conditions
- Blockages air flow into the pet's chest. In the case of breeds with "pushed-in" faces like Bulldogs and Pugs blockages to normal airflow can result from that breed's anatomy. Some cancers can cause airflow blockages as well.
- Direct exposure to the sun.
- Excessive activity in hot humid weather.
- Poor ventilation such as the inside of a vehicle with rolled up windows.

Signs:

- Rectal temperature above 105.0 F.
- Early hyperthermia: rapid panting, dry gums, fast heart rate
- Advanced hyperthermia: Coma, gray gums, progressing to vomiting and diarrhea.

Things to do:

- Take the rectal temperature. If it's under 103.5 F: Apply rubbing alcohol often to the paws, arm pits, and groin. Mist (don't soak) the dog with water and turn a fan on him/her. Offer water to drink. Get that pet to a veterinarian fast. Try to call on your way.
- If the rectal temperature is over 103.5: Cover the pet with cold wet towels, replacing them often as they get warm. Get that pet to a veterinarian fast. Try to call on your way. Do not offer water, as the pet may not be able to swallow normally.

Things NOT to do:

- Don't put the dog in an ice water bath. This causes constriction of blood vessels that will reduce heat loss.
- Don't continue cooling the pet after the temperature drops below 103.0 F.
- Don't give medications.
- Don't monkey around with ice water enemas. They may be useful, but giving enemas should be the doctor's call.

Follow-up:

- Have the pet seen by the doctor even if things go great. Make sure that there are no lasting effects.

Injuries-Severe

Causes:

- Hit by a car.
- Kicked by a horse.
- Falls, such as from a moving vehicle.
- Cats and small dogs mauled by big dogs.
- Gun shots.
- Arrows and other projectiles.
- Physical abuse.

Signs:

- Struggling to inhale or exhale.
- Debris or foreign objects in the mouth or throat that could obstruct breathing.
- Gums that have a purple cast or color – meaning that there is insufficient oxygen in the blood.
- Pale gums-meaning poor blood circulation.
- A dull mental state-another sign of poor circulation.
- Arterial bleeding. Bright red spurting blood must be stopped fast using a very firm compression bandage made of cloth or bandage material.
- Sucking chest wounds – that is, when air moves in and out through a hole in the side of the chest.

- Inability to stand or walk due to broken bones, back injury, or nerve injury.
- Abdominal pain.
- Flaccid or rigid limbs. This indicates serious nerve injury.
- Pupils that fail to respond to bright light. If the pupils don't change size or shape when you shine a bright light in your pet's eyes, it indicates a head injury--a very bad sign.

Things to do:

- Be cautious. Injured dogs and cats can lash out from fear and delirium. It's hard to help a pet if you're injured too.
- Take any injured pet to an emergency veterinarian ASAP. The first hour after a serious injury is crucial to survival. A pet can appear to be miraculously fine immediately after a trauma. But complications can develop quickly that could end that life. Never gamble nor assume.
- Carefully open the mouth and clear away any foreign material.
- Bright red, spurting blood must be stopped fast using a *very* firm compression bandage made of cloth or bandage material.
- Seal a sucking chest wound fast using a bandage or cloth tied or taped snugly around the chest-not tight. Apply ointment or Vaseline to the bandage to form a seal with the wound to prevent more air leakage. Do this quickly, while you're transporting your pet to the animal hospital.
- Handle fractured limbs and neurologic injury carefully. Use a board or sheet of plywood to keep the pet flat. If a pet with a fracture starts flailing around, the pain will intensify. In addition there will be damage to the blood supply to the broken bones.
- Transport the injured pet with the head and neck extended (head pointed straight out) to provide an open airway for ease of breathing.
- Have someone call the emergency veterinarian so that they are ready for your arrival.

Things not to do:

- Never apply a tourniquet to a bleeding limb. Tourniquets usually do more harm than good.
- Try to avoid using a muzzle on a dog who has any difficulty breathing. If a muzzle is used, it must be removed as soon as it is no longer essential. Breathing problems can start anytime.
- Don't panic. The phrase "Don't just stand there--do something" does not apply. Much better in an emergency is to stand there for a minute and do nothing but breathe. Think carefully -- then act decisively.
- Don't "wait and see." Even a competent emergency veterinarian would not assess an injured pet at home and opt for observation only. Thorough lab work, X-rays, and repeated exams are necessary in the hospital to determine if a pet may actually have "dodged the bullet."
- Never remove a projectile. If an arrow, stick, metal rod, wire, or other object has stabbed into the body, *leave it!* If you remove an object that is still in place, you may unleash severe bleeding. Oftentimes an object that has penetrated an important blood vessel prevents leakage of blood as long as it remains. Allow the surgeon to remove the object when your pet is on the operating table.

Follow-up:

- Allow no delays in getting the pet treated. Delays kill.
- Turn the pet's well being over to the veterinary medical staff. Do not economize. Short cuts have cost the lives of many pets who could have survived.
- Treatment options of internal injuries can be debatable even for an experienced emergency staff. You must trust the judgment of the professionals. Surgery may be recommended immediately or within 1 or 2 days of the injury.
- You may be given an uncertain prognosis for your pet's recovery. This can be emotionally difficult. Say a prayer and ride it out. Don't press the doctor for clear-cut answers early in the process. He or she may make the mistake of giving you an educated guess. These are meaningless, because anything can happen in the early stages of emergency treatment.
- Fractures seem to get the most attention from pet owners, but taking care of a fracture is rarely a life-saving priority. Protect the fractured limb during transport to the animal hospital, but allow the emergency staff to manage the higher priorities first.

Insect Bites and Stings

Causes:

- Most commonly bees, wasps, hornets, yellow jackets, and fire ants. Here are the characteristics of each:
 - Honeybees leave their stinger and venom sac behind in the skin. This kills the bee.
 - Wasps and hornets do not leave their stinger in the victim. Thus they can sting the pet repeatedly.
 - Fire ants: First they bite the skin with two powerful pinching jaws, then they sting. This causes a circular pattern on the skin with two central holes in the skin.
- More rarely, black widow spiders cause a non-painful bite that can progress to severe muscle cramping. Abdominal cramping can cause difficult breathing, muscle spasms, and anxiety-even seizures. Cats can be so sensitive to black widow bites that they can become paralyzed.
- Brown recluse spider bites are non-painful but develop pain and redness 2-6 hours later. A blister forms later then a bull's eye pattern on the skin is seen.
- Scorpion stings cause pain immediately.

Signs:

- Local redness, pain, and swelling.
- If a pet gets several stings, he or she can get a fever and become lethargic up to several days later. Watch for the following:
 - Staggering
 - Paralysis of the face
 - Seizures
 - Vomiting-possibly brown in color
 - Red-brown urine.
 - Bloody stool
- Joint pain can follow brown recluse spider bites.
- Scorpion stings can result in drooling, watering of the eyes, and dilated pupils. The worst case (unusual) is death from abnormal heart rhythms and respiratory arrest.

Things to do:

- If it's a bee sting, scrape the stinger out with a knife blade as soon as possible. A stinger can release venom for up to 2-3 minutes after the bee leaves it behind in the skin.
- If several stings have occurred, take the pet to the animal hospital right away as the pet could develop shock.
- If your pet has been attacked by fire ants, treatment is rarely required. Applying ice to the stings usually helps.
- If it's a minor sting of any kind, quickly applying an underarm antiperspirant helps reduce the swelling and pain.
- If your pet is bitten by a black widow, brown recluse spider, or scorpion, take the victim to the doctor quickly--just in case.

Things NOT to do:

- Don't squeeze the skin around a bee sting. If any of the stinger is still in the skin, this will release more venom.

Follow-up:

- For pets with multiple bee stings or black widow spider bites, the veterinarian may recommend hospitalization. IV treatments may be necessary.
- Medical treatment may be the same as for **Swelling of the Face, Legs, and Paws** (see this section).
- Black widow bites may also need treatment with IV calcium gluconate.

Lameness

Causes:

- Injuries:
 - Hit by a car
 - Falls
 - Crushing by sliding doors, horse hooves, car tires, or other objects.
 - Twists and sprains. (Even if injuries are nonviolent, they may damage supportive structures inside joints.)
- Birth defects
 - Bone and joint deformities that develop as a youngster grows. The best known is hip dysplasia, seen mostly in medium to large breed dogs and dislocating knee caps (luxating patellas) found often in smaller dog breeds. Any joint can have a defect, however, in any species.
- Diseases of the nervous system of an adult pet:
 - Herniation of the discs in the back of dog breeds like German Shepherds and Dachshunds.
 - Tumors of the spinal cord or of the nerves of the limbs.
 - Nerve damage in the back or limbs (from hit by car or other injury.)
- Infections beneath the skin such as abscesses. (See the section on Abscesses)
- Degenerative joint disease-arthritis:
 - Age related
 - Joint disease resulting from penetrating wounds
 - Multiple joint involvement such as Rheumatoid arthritis.
- Nutritional
 - Diets that are all meat result in weak bones that fracture easily.
- Bone Cancer
 - Usually in older, large-breed dogs
 - Usually quite painful
 - Cancers that spread from other sites -- such as some breast and prostate cancers

Signs:

- Severe pain in some cases. Other injuries can be pain free. This does not make them less important.
- Signs of limping can vary, depending on the severity of the problem and its cause. In some pets the limp may be barely detectable. Or it may be so pronounced that a pet won't put any weight at all on a leg.
- Some pets are lame on more than one leg. Shifting of weight to reduce pain can falsely implicate the wrong limb. Accurate diagnosis of some lamenesses can be challenging, even for specialists.
- Some kinds of lameness will improve over several days or weeks. Beware of this. Mother Nature will thicken supportive structures as the pet learns to shift the load-bearing to other legs. This will give the appearance of natural healing when, in fact, the affected joint is developing permanent degenerative arthritis.

Things to do:

- If your pet has been hit by a car or endured other severe injury, follow the guidelines *Injuries-Severe*.
- For a non-life-threatening lameness, do the following:
 - Raise the pet's lip in good light and evaluate the color of the gums. If pale, gray, or purple, the pet is in serious trouble and needs a doctor immediately.
 - Shine a bright light into the eyes. If both pupils do not constrict within 2 or 3 seconds, the pet may have had an undetected serious injury. This pet needs an exam ASAP.
 - Observe your pet to make sure that he or she feels otherwise OK – that is, eating well and staying bright and alert. Watch to be sure your pet can urinate and pass stool normally. If all of the above is OK and there is no sign of bleeding, swelling, bruising, or other injuries, you can take your time.
- Be gentle and slow. Pain may be severe and confined to a small, specific area. If you touch this place roughly, even the most gentle, loving pet can bite quickly.
- Handle each limb carefully and thoroughly, starting at the tip of the paw. Gently squeeze the muscles as you move up the limb. Bend and straighten each joint.
- A minor lameness can be observed at home for 1-3 days. *Any* pet who is still lame (even a little bit) after 3 days needs a thorough exam and possibly X-rays.

- Home remedies:
 - Can be dangerous. *Aspirin, ibuprofen, and Tylenol (acetaminophen) are never to be used on cats.*
 - Tylenol can be used on some dogs. Others may get liver damage. Best to avoid.
 - Here's the rule for giving aspirin to dogs: You may give one tablet per 50 pounds of body weight every 8-12 hours for 1-3 days. If the dog is normal after 1-3 days, stop the aspirin. If the lameness returns, you must have that dog examined. *Never give aspirin to a vomiting dog.*
- Call your veterinarian and discuss the symptoms even in apparently minor cases where the lameness seems to be improving nicely at home. The more medical information and advice you can get, the better.

Things NOT to do:

- Don't try to apply a splint or cast. If your pet has a fracture or other serious injury, this can worsen the damage.
- Never transport a dog who's in pain unless that dog is muzzled. Be safe and careful. Remove the muzzle when possible to allow for panting. Never leave a muzzled dog unattended. Do not muzzle a dog who has difficulty breathing.
- Don't move a cat in pain unless the cat is wrapped in a thick towel. There are two reasons: (1) Cats feel more secure when they're snugly wrapped. (2) A cat who's wrapped up in a thick covering can neither bite nor claw.
- Reminder: **Never** give a cat **Aspirin or Tylenol** (acetaminophen).
- Never give aspirin to a vomiting dog. Avoid ibuprofen.
- Don't permit exercise until the doctor says so. This can make the damage much worse.

Follow-up:

- If your pet has a lameness that at first improved with home care, but reappeared, be sure to get a good exam. A problem like this may be setting the stage for a long-term, painful disability.
- Follow your veterinarian's advice on X-rays. Sedation or, better still, general anesthesia will allow the veterinary staff to position the affected limb carefully for a detailed and diagnostically accurate X-ray. Don't cut corners on expense. A missed or incorrect lameness diagnosis is often the result of poorly positioned X-rays taken without the benefit of sedation or anesthesia.
- Second opinions: If the doctor recommends a surgery or other treatment that you are not pleased to hear, do not shoot the messenger. Instead, explain that you would feel better if the doctor could provide the consultation of one more knowledgeable expert outside of his or her animal hospital. Make it clear by your tone that you trust the doctor. You just want one more perspective. Good, confident doctors are happy to oblige and keep you happy. Do not damage the relationship.

Pain

Causes:

- Injury
- Joint or bone disease
- Abdominal disease
- Cancers

Signs:

- Crying
- Sudden behavior change, moodiness, grumpy, attempts to bite when handled
- Violent thrashing
- Subdued behavior, especially in cats

Things to do:

- Look for a clear cause
- Don't overstress the pet
- Look for injuries
- Give aspirin to a dog only if:
 - There is no sign of bleeding.

- There is no vomiting.
- You have a dog who is over 12 weeks of age. The dose is one tablet per 50 pounds of body weight. Tablets can be split for smaller dogs.
- Handle the pet gently if back pain is suspected. Transport the dog or cat on a board or sheet of plywood to keep the back as straight and as flat as possible.

Things NOT to do:

- Don't give aspirin to a cat—ever!
- Don't give ibuprofen, Tylenol, nor any other human medication to any pet without a veterinarian's advice.

Follow-Up:

- If pain is the only noticeable problem, we must still find and treat the cause. Get an appointment to see the doctor ASAP.

Paralysis and Staggering

Causes:

- Injuries such as being hit by a car or taking a fall. See the section on *Injuries –Severe*.
- Spinal cord damage from a herniated disc in dachshunds, Lhasa Apsos, Shih Tzus, Welsh Corgis, Beagles, Cocker Spaniels, Pekinese, German Shepherds, and occasionally Labrador Retrievers.
- Cancers
- A slowly progressive spinal cord disease of German shepherds called degenerative myelopathy.
- Infections and other inflammation of the nervous system and middle or inner ear.
- Antifreeze and other toxic agents.
- Over dose of the drugs metronidazole (commonly prescribed for liver and intestinal disease) and Heartgard (monthly heartworm preventative).
- Vestibular syndrome. (This problem occurs suddenly in cats and especially dogs. It resolves by itself, but these pets must be examined by a doctor to rule out other, more serious causes.)

Signs:

- A paralyzed pet is one who cannot stand on the rear limbs or on any limbs. This pet is fully conscious. The paralysis may be partial—that is, allowing some movement and feeling in the limbs.
- Complete paralysis occurs when the pet has neither pain sensation the ability to move the front or back limbs.
- Staggering (ataxia) is lack of coordination of the limbs.
- Head tilt, walking in circles head shaking, and rapid eye movements.

Things to do:

- Strictly confine the pet until a thorough exam can be done by a veterinarian. Movement can cause further injury if your pet has spinal cord damage.
- Handle the pet gently. Transport the dog or cat on a board or sheet of plywood to keep the back as straight and as flat as possible.
- Get the pet to the veterinarian ASAP, especially if the pet is a dog breed prone to spinal cord damage from a herniated disc (see above in “Causes”).
- Quickly scan the area where your pet may have spent time. Look for possible poisons like automotive antifreeze.

Things NOT to do:

- Don't “wait-and-see”. There are so many different possible causes for paralysis and staggering that you may be inadvertently jeopardizing your pet's recovery by delaying treatment.
- Don't try home remedies. If your pet has been given a drug overdose or has drunk antifreeze, you may worsen the problem.
- Don't induce vomiting unless you're instructed to do so by your veterinarian. An uncoordinated pet who vomits can inhale some of the vomitus and suffocate.

Follow-up:

- Depending on the cause of the symptoms the doctor may recommend X-rays, CT or MRI scans, surgery, or treatment for poisoning.
- In some cases, the doctor may recommend rest and confinement for your pet.

Penis: Discharges

Causes:

- Infections of the prostate. (The prostate is a male gland that sits just behind the bladder. The tube that carries urine, the urethra, runs through the prostate.)
- Bladder infections, which also cause frequent straining to urinate.
- Urinary blockage- bladder stones or crystals that lodge in the urethra.
- Many dogs who have not been neutered have a persistent pus-like discharge from the penis. If it's only a small amount and your dog licks it only occasionally, it's actually OK. If you neuter that boy, it will almost certainly stop completely.

Signs:

- Stones, a gritty paste-like substance, pus, or blood from the penis
- Straining or difficulty urinating.
- Persistent licking of the penis.

Things to do:

- If you find a stone or a gritty paste-like substance at the tip of your cat or dog's penis save it in a jar for your veterinarian to send for analysis.
- Get that pet treated fast. A male cat who strains often in the litter pan could be in serious trouble. These boys can die quickly from urinary blockage. Male dogs can also experience a complete blockage of urine flow that can kill.

Things NOT to do:

- Don't try home remedies. There is nothing that you can do at home that will make any positive difference.

Follow-up:

- If your dog or cat has a discharge but eats and feels well, it's OK to wait until the next available appointment before going to the doctor.
- A dog or cat who is eating poorly or has pain when handled may have a medical emergency. Don't break the speed limit, but get this fellow seen ASAP.
- Diagnostic work may include X-rays and urine tests. Surgery could be necessary.

Penis: Swollen/Engorged

Causes:

- Failure of normal blood return from an erect penis. (The condition is called paraphimosis.)
- Paraphimosis is caused by the haired sheath of the penis getting caught behind the swelling of an erect penis. The sheath, or the hair on the sheath, can prevent the blood that has filled the erect penis from flowing normally.
- Without proper return of the blood in the penis, the tissue of the penis may die.

Signs:

- If a dog's penis looks red, swollen, and enlarged for more than 10 minutes, he may have paraphimosis.
- A normal erection is normal. It does not persist more than several minutes.

Things to do:

- Lubricate the penis, especially the portion near its base. K-Y jelly or other water-based lubricant is best. If not available, use Vaseline.
- After the area is well lubricated, pull forward gently on the haired sheath that you will find behind the shaft of the swollen, erect penis.
- If the erect penis does not slip back inside the sheath, you will need the help of your veterinarian. Do not waste time. Call the animal hospital and get going.

Things NOT to do:

- Don't "wait and see." Mother Nature will cause a normal erection to relax and return to the inside of the haired sheath within several minutes, even right after breeding.

Follow-up:

- If you are successful at getting the erect penis into the sheath and the swelling resolves in a few minutes, your dog is fine. Keep a close eye on that guy for a few days to be sure that the problem does not repeat.

Seizures (Convulsions, Fits)

Causes:

- Epilepsy
- Nursing mothers with low blood calcium (eclampsia).
- Low blood sugar; can occur in puppies and kittens who are fed only 1-2 times per day.
- Head injury
- Brain tumor and infections.
- Blood loss, which robs the brain of oxygen, causing seizures.
- Shock, low blood pressure.
- Heart disease.
- Some cancers; kidney, or liver disease
- Poisoning by
 - Insecticides, including those in pet store flea and tick shampoos, dips, and sprays.
 - Lead, which can be swallowed from old paint, fishing sinkers, pipe joint compound, old lead toys, curtain weights, dust and paint flakes from bridges and water towers, artist's paints, lead shot, lead glazed pottery, solder, linoleum, putty, gasoline, motor oil, tar paper and roofing materials, golf balls, batteries, some insulation, and some inks and dyes.
 - Automotive antifreeze
 - Agricultural pesticides which can be absorbed through the skin or by being swallowed.
- Some birth defects

Signs:

- Seizure activity is a sudden onset of uncontrolled jerking or flexing of the limbs or of the entire body.
- A resulting increased body temperature occurs in cases of frequent or continued seizures.
- Continued seizure activity can cause nerve death in the brain.
- A pet who has had one seizure is likely to have another.
- A seizure can cause a pet to be unresponsive to his or her owner's voice. Some pets are partially responsive.
- Partial seizures cause symptoms such as staring blindly, tail biting, snapping at imaginary flies. These are important but are not emergencies.

Things to do:

- If a seizure continues for more than 10 minutes, your pet has a true emergency. Get your pet to the doctor ASAP.
- On the way to the doctor's, try to calm the pet (don't struggle) while the seizure activity quiets down.
- In cases of continued or frequent seizures, take the pet's rectal temperature. If greater than 105 F follow instructions in the section on **Heat Stroke-Hyperthermia**.

- For pets with continual seizures, keep the neck extended to allow free passage of air into the throat and lungs.
- During a seizure, move objects so that the pet does not knock things over and cause injury.
- Be observant. If the pet's mouth is open, note the color of the gums and tongue in a good light. Time the length of the active portion of the seizure as well as the recovery period. The seizure is not completely over until the pet is standing.
- When the pet has relaxed enough to allow safe handling of the mouth, rub honey or Karo syrup on the gums. This will provide sugar to the blood stream quickly. A pet who's had a seizure due to low blood sugar will improve in several minutes. This step is especially important if your pet has diabetes or if that pet is a youngster.
- When a nursing mother dog has a seizure, it's usually the result of low calcium. Take the rectal temperature and cool the pet as directed in *Heat Stroke-Hyperthermia*. Take this dog to your veterinarian ASAP for intravenous calcium.
- Head injuries can cause seizures immediately -- or within several months after the injury. If your pet has a head injury, go to the veterinarian immediately.
- Quickly scan the area where your pet may have spent time. Look for possible poisons like automotive antifreeze or insect or rodent bait.
- If your pet faints, it's an emergency. And if your pet doesn't not recover consciousness in 3 minutes, it's high priority emergency.

Things NOT to do:

- Never reach into a seizing pet's mouth. These pets have out-of-control brain activity. You can easily get bitten. Pets can't swallow their tongues, so there's no need to reach into the mouth.

Follow-up:

- All pets with occasional seizures need a thorough diagnostic workup, including blood tests and urine tests.
- Seizures that, in the doctor's estimation, are not typical of epilepsy may require further investigation. This may include a spinal tap, CT scanning, or MRI.
- If heart disease is suspected, an electrocardiogram and X-rays will be needed.
- Poisoning suspects will need specific testing and treatment.
- Prevent low calcium in nursing mother dogs by feeding your mother dog a high-quality puppy diet from early pregnancy through weaning.

Snake Bites

Causes:

- Poisonous snakes belong to three groups in the U.S.
 - Colubrids-Minor importance
 - Elapids-
 - The poisonous brightly colored coral snakes: "*Red on Yellow--Kill a Fellow*"
 - King Snakes, "*Red on Black--Venom Lack*"
 - Pit Vipers, which include water moccasins, copperheads, and rattlesnakes. All are poisonous.
 - Copperheads and most rattlesnakes usually produce minimal symptoms in pets.
 - Mojave rattlesnakes can cause respiratory arrest and rapid death.

Signs:

- Snake bites can be hard to diagnose. Look for the following:
 - Fang marks
 - Swelling and pain that appear within 1 hour after the pet is bitten.
 - Redness and bruising
 - Sometimes vomiting, difficulty breathing, rapid heart rate, rapid eye movements, and fever

Things to do:

- Take the snake-bitten pet to the nearest animal hospital ASAP. Try to call on the way.

- If you're unsure whether the pet was snake bitten, measure the swollen area often. Rapid, increased swelling means a likely snakebite.

Things NOT to do:

- Don't get bitten as you rescue the injured pet
- Don't bother with tourniquets nor try methods of sucking out the venom. Those measures just delay getting the pet to the doctor – and they don't really help.

Follow-up:

- Quick IV treatment for shock and possible complications like bleeding disorders.
- Blood and urine tests to assess kidney function and normal blood clotting
- Antivenin-antidote therapy is occasionally administered, but it's seldom necessary, and the cost is high. This therapy can also be risky because the antivenin may produce serum sickness and allergic reactions.

Swelling of the Abdomen or Bloating

Causes:

- Swelling and twisting of the stomach. Called gastric dilatation-volvulus (GDV), this problem is seen in medium to large breed, deep chested dogs. It is a true emergency if you see a swelling in the portion of the dog that is midway between the shoulders and the hips.
- Cancers-common in dogs over age 8.
- Injuries that cause severe internal bleeding or rupture of the bladder such as being hit by a car or getting bitten by a large dog.
- Fluid accumulation caused by heart and/or liver failure.
- Severe infections of the uterus.
- Poisoning with anticoagulants like rat or mouse bait. Internal bleeding results.
- Pregnancy. If your dog or cat is unspayed, has a swollen abdomen, and eats and feels normal, you don't have to believe in her virtue. Your sweet young girl doesn't mean to mislead you about her private life; she just feels that it's none of your business. If in doubt, have her examined.

Signs:

- Swelling of the belly behind the ribs
- If severe enough, the pet may also have some difficulty breathing because of pressure on the diaphragm.
- Pets with moderately to severely swollen abdomens may have a poor appetite and lethargy. Vomiting may also occur.
- Sudden onset of abdominal swelling (GDV) in a medium to large breed dog may cause attempts to belch or retch.

Things to do:

- Even if the pet is walking, eating, and breathing normally, see the veterinarian soon. If there are problems with these basic functions, take that pet to the animal hospital right away. It's an emergency.
- Medium to large dogs with sudden onset of swelling of the abdomen must go to the animal hospital as a true emergency-they may have GDV. The prognosis for GDV is good only if surgery is done within a few hours after the onset of swelling.

Things NOT to do:

- Don't try home remedies like anti-gas or anti-acid medications.
- Don't squeeze the pet's abdomen. This could cause bleeding, rupture of organs, or difficulty breathing.

Follow-up:

- Swollen, twisted stomachs and uterine infections are usually curable by surgery if treated early.
- Cancers are usually best treated first by surgery, followed by chemotherapy. This diagnosis will require some in-depth testing.
- Severe abdominal injuries may require surgery. This will be the doctor's judgment call.
- If the abdomen is swollen by fluid because of organ failure, the condition isn't curable. But it may be manageable with medications.

Swelling of the Face, Legs, and Paws

Causes:

- Allergic reactions to insect stings.
- Injuries such as severe bruising and fractured bones-See the section on **Injuries-Severe**.
- Infected wounds including pus filled abscesses-See the section on **Abscesses**.
- Snake bites-See the section on **Snake Bites**.

Signs:

- Sudden onset of swelling of the entire face.
- Leg and paw swelling also occurs in some cases of allergic reactions to insect stings.
- May be accompanied by vomiting and diarrhea. Severe allergic reactions can progress to difficulty breathing. This is called anaphylaxis and, if it occurs, is likely to be seen within a few minutes after a pet has been stung.

Things to Do:

- A quick visit to the doctor is in order anytime a general swelling of the face or other large body part occurs. Most swellings of this type resolve without treatment. But for the unusual case that worsens, medical treatment may be necessary to save a pet's life.
- Handle the pet gently and slowly. Prevent excitement.
- *If your pet has a known risk of anaphylaxis*, you can administer an injection under the telephone supervision of a veterinarian. Advance preparedness and practice before the event is ideal. Kits are available for human use that include an injection of epinephrine. The proper dose is 0.01 to 0.02 milligrams (mg.) per pound of body weight injected subcutaneously (under the skin). To avoid fiddling with the math when minutes count, have it well planned if your pet has had a prior close encounter with anaphylaxis.

Things NOT to do:

- Don't allow the pet to become excited or active. If breathing difficulty ensues, exertion could be high risk.

Follow-up:

- Don't wait and see if facial or limb swelling causes advanced symptoms. Once an allergic reaction progresses to anaphylaxis, you may run out of time.
- If epinephrine has been given and the pet looks good, go to the animal hospital quickly anyway. Additional treatment may still be important.
- The doctor may want to give injectable antihistamines, corticosteroids, or IV fluids. Also, your pet may need to be hospitalized to monitor for delayed reactions.

Urination- Inability to Urinate

Causes:

- Urinary blockage, i.e. bladder stones or crystals that lodge in the urethra. Most often seen in male cats and male dogs.
- Bladder infections and inflammations. These will also cause frequent straining to urinate.

- In Dalmatians, bladder stones composed of ammonium urate are a common problem. All Dalmatians must be watched closely for straining or difficulty urinating.
- Cancer
- Diseases of the urethra and prostate are seen in dogs who have not been neutered.
- Nerve injuries-most likely due to injury such as being hit by a car.
- Birth defects

Signs:

- Attempts to squat or hike the leg to urinate for prolonged periods with little or no urine flow.
- Stone, gritty, paste-like substance, pus, or blood from the penis.
- Straining or difficulty urinating.
- Persistent licking of the penis.
- Crying in pain, poor appetite, vomiting, and lethargy.
- Coma and death if not treated in time.
- Sometimes, excessive drinking with a prior history of excessive urinating.

Things to do:

- If there is any doubt about a pet's ability to pass urine, treat it as an emergency. If you wait and see, your pet could die quickly.
- A pet who is eating poorly or has pain when handled may be a medical emergency. Get this fellow seen ASAP.
- If you find a stone or a gritty, paste-like substance at the tip of your cat or dog's penis, save it in a jar for your veterinarian. The veterinarian may want to send it in for analysis.
- A male cat who strains often in the litter pan could be in serious trouble. These boys can die quickly from urinary blockage. Get him treated fast.

Things NOT to do:

- Don't try home remedies. There is nothing you can do at home that will make any positive difference.

Follow-up:

- Diagnostic work may include X-rays, urine and blood tests. Surgery could be necessary.
- Pets with dehydration, electrolyte imbalance, or rupture of the bladder will need emergency supportive care including IV fluids and hospitalization. Abnormal heart rhythms may also occur. These pets need intensive treatment and may not survive.
- If your pet can't urinate, the back-up of urine can quickly cause kidney damage. To save your pet's life, emergency anesthesia for urinary catheterization and/or surgery of the penis or urethra may be essential.
- Long-term diet changes will be needed for pets with bladder stones or urethral stones.
- Antibiotics for infection.
- Neutering for prostate disease. The prostate itself may also need surgery.

Vaginal Discharge

Causes:

- Infections of the vagina or uterus.
- Urinary infections (less common).
- Occasionally foreign material such as a piece of plant material lodged in the vagina.

Signs:

- Pus-like discharge seen at the vulva (the female genitals).
- Persistent licking of the vulva
- Spotting of pus or blood where the female dog has laid down.
- Sometimes poor appetite, lethargy, excessive drinking and urination.
- Sometimes abdominal pain.

Things to do:

- Provide plenty of drinking water.
- Hurry to the veterinarian if that girl is feeling at all sick.
- If she feels normal but has a pus-like vaginal discharge, have her examined within the day. Sooner is better.

Things NOT to do:

- Don't "wait and see." Left untreated, your pet could get a severe infection of the bladder or uterus that may lead to organ disease or death.

Follow-up:

- Follow the doctor's instructions. Medications or surgery may be recommended. There is no "do-it-yourself" on this type of problem.
- Blood and urine tests may be important. An infected uterus may necessitate spaying (ovariohysterectomy).

Vomiting and Diarrhea (severe)

Causes:

- Dietary indiscretion (garbage gut).
- Blockages with foreign objects or from twists of the stomach or intestine.
- Cancers, nervous system disorders, hormone imbalances.
- Diseases of the pancreas, liver, kidneys, uterus.
- Infections caused by parvo virus and/or bacteria.
- Inflammatory disease
- Parasites (worms and other parasites)
- Stress
- Over-the-counter household medications such as aspirin, Tylenol, and ibuprofen.

Signs:

- Repeated throwing up or passing soft or fluid stool. Blood in the vomit or stool is a very serious sign usually indicating significant inflammation or damage from aspirin or other medications.
- Frequent attempts to vomit and/or straining to pass stool. If your pet is passing nothing, look carefully to find stool (sometimes just fluid) or vomitus. In severe cases of vomiting and diarrhea the pet can
- eventually "run out" of stuff to vomit or pass rectally. Thus it may look as though the pet is trying to vomit or defecate without success when in fact the symptoms are continuing despite a lack of matter to be passed.
- Dehydration and shock. These can cause death.
 - Rub your finger along the gums. Dry, sticky gums usually mean significant dehydration.
 - Pick up a handful of skin over the neck or shoulders and let it go. If the skin takes longer than one second to snap back to its normal position, the pet is probably dehydrated.
 - Shock is a problem if the gums are pale pink or gray in color.
- General weakness often associated with electrolyte imbalance.
- Little or no appetite.

Things to do:

- If a dog is trying *unsuccessfully* to vomit, see the section on **Swelling of the Abdomen or Bloating**.
- If you're unsure whether the problem can be treated at home call your veterinarian for answers.
- Provide water.
- Take your pet to the veterinarian if repeated vomiting and/or diarrhea continues more than one or two hours. If a pet vomits every time he/she drinks, provide water in small amounts often.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after handling your pet. Some organisms can be infectious to humans.

Things NOT to do:

- Don't give your pet home remedies like Pepto Bismol, Kaopectate, or Imodium for repeated, severe symptoms. While these treatments can be useful for minor cases, they could damage the health of severely sick pets. Your veterinarian can advise you.
- Don't give your pet any food until you're instructed to do so by your veterinarian.

Follow-up:

- Severe vomiting and diarrhea will require hospitalization for IV fluid and electrolyte replacement.
- Diagnostic tests will include blood, urine, and stool tests, as well as x-rays to find the underlying causes.
- Endoscopy may be needed to retrieve foreign material or to take diagnostic biopsy samples.
- If infectious causes are considered, wash down surfaces using a Chlorox:water mixture in a dilution of 1 part Chlorox to 30 parts water.

Weakness and Fainting

Causes:

- Heart Failure
- Shock
- Severe pain
- Head injury
- Blood loss and other causes of anemia (low number of red blood cells)
- Infections of the brain and spinal cord
- Advanced internal disease including:
 - Diabetes mellitus
 - Low blood sugar
 - Infections of the pancreas or abdomen (peritonitis)
 - Liver or other internal organ disease
- Advanced infections
- Poisoning

Signs:

- Depending on the cause, some pets will be fine when resting but become unable to walk without showing weakness or fainting.
- Many pets with this symptom will be unable to rest without fainting.
- Gray or pale gums are signs of shock or blood loss. Purple gums indicate low oxygen in the blood. Any abnormal color is a sign of a true emergency.

Things to Do:

- Handle the pet gently and slowly to prevent pain. Pain can cause struggling which may worsen the problem.
- Get that pet to the veterinarian immediately. Call the animal hospital on your way so that the doctor will be ready for your pet's arrival. Your pet may be facing imminent death.
- Provide drinking water.
- On the way to the animal hospital, take the rectal temperature. If the temperature is above 103.5 F or below 99.0 F, treat according to the instructions in this section on **Heat Stroke** or **Cold, Sluggish**.
- Supplemental oxygen may be helpful in cases of pale pink, gray, or purple gums. If someone nearby has an unused oxygen cylinder, hold the breathing tubes close to the pet's nose and mouth, and allow the pet to inhale on the way to the animal hospital.
- If you know that your pet has diabetes, rub some honey or Karo Syrup on the gums to improve what may be low blood sugar.
- Apply firm pressure with a cloth bandage or an article of clothing to any bleeding wound.

Things NOT to Do:

- Don't allow the pet to become excited. This will increase his/her oxygen needs and worsen the problem.
- Avoid applying any kind of pressure around the neck or chest. The pet needs to breathe as easily as possible.
- Don't give your pet any medications.
- Don't delay. Immediate treatment is essential.

Follow-up:

- Be prepared for the doctor to recommend extensive diagnostic testing including ECG, X-rays, blood and urine testing, and doppler blood pressure measurements.
- Hospitalization may be needed to stabilize your pet. He or she could need lifelong treatment, so you may have to learn how to administer medications or therapy at home.

I sincerely hope this is helpful.

All the Best,

Jeff Nichol, D.V.M.