

4. First Aid for Your Dog

The following is a brief guide for owners whose dogs are involved in emergencies.

4.1 Gastric Dilation

Also known as “bloat”, gastric dilation is a sudden enlargement of the stomach, usually when it is full of fermenting food and gas. The condition becomes complicated when the stomach twists (torsion), blocking the entrance and exit. Large breeds of dogs are most commonly affected (i.e., those over 40 pounds).

Signs

- Sudden enlargement of the abdomen, often soon after eating
- Abdomen feels taut and hollow
- In great pain and distress
- Difficulty with breathing
- May attempt to vomit or pass feces
- Stands still with head lowered and is unable to sit or lie down

Action

Seek veterinary advice at once. Immediate surgery is required if the dog is to be saved, so be prepared to take the dog to the veterinary surgeon. The vet will not be able to treat the dog in your home.

Avoidance

In many cases, gastric dilation and torsion can be avoided if these simple guidelines are followed:

- Do not exercise your dog close to feeding times.
- Avoid feeding very large meals. Split the feed into two smaller portions and give these at least several hours apart.
- Do not allow excessive drinking immediately after feeding.

4.2 Acute Diarrhea

Signs

Very loose motions, which may contain blood. This may be accompanied by vomiting.

Action

If the dog is otherwise acting normally:

- Withhold all food for 24 hours.
- Allow small drinks of glucose water.
- After 24 hours without food, provided the diarrhea has stopped, give a light diet of chicken, fish, or scrambled egg. Gradually return to normal diet over a period of 3-4 days.

If symptoms persist or the dog is lethargic and weak or off his/her food, consult a veterinarian as soon as possible.

4.3 Vomiting

Dogs have a natural tendency to vomit from time to time. It is not uncommon for a dog to regurgitate food after eating too quickly, or to vomit small amounts of bile accompanied by a few blades of grass. These are not to be taken as signs of serious illness.

Sudden and persistent vomiting may be a sign of serious illness, and appropriate action should be taken.

Action

- Withhold all food and water.
- Contact your veterinarian.

A dog that has vomited repeatedly often develops a great thirst. If allowed free access to water, the dog will continue a cycle of drinking and vomiting until completely dehydrated. While waiting to consult a vet, it is best to give only one tablespoon every hour of either seltzer or glucose and water.

4.4 Minor Cuts, Grazes, and Scratches

Any small wounds noticed when grooming can be cleansed with lukewarm salt water to prevent infection. If the area around the wound is inflamed, it may already have become infected. If in doubt, consult a veterinarian.

4.5 Ear Problems

Signs

- Shaking head
- Scratching ears
- Holding head to one side
- Rubbing head on the ground
- Ears feel hot and are smelly

Action

Consult your veterinarian.

Never insert anything into the ears as they are very easily damaged.

4.6 Feet

Eczema Between Toes

Signs

- Chewing feet
- Feet feel moist and hot underneath
- Lameness

Action

- Bathe with Epsom Salts and warm water.
- Dry thoroughly.
- Prevent dog from licking feet.

If the symptoms persist, consult your veterinarian.

Tar

Signs

- Sticky, hot feet
- Matted hair
- Lameness
- Smell of tar

Action

- Remove any long hair from between toes.
- Rub lard or cooking oil into affected area.
- Wash area with detergent and warm water.
- Rinse thoroughly.
- After removing as much tar as possible, consult your veterinarian since tar can make feet very sore.

Chewing Gum

Chewing gum can become stuck to the dog's feet or coat, especially in warm weather.

Signs

Lameness if on feet – otherwise, gum is usually found in coat when grooming

Action

Solidify the gum by holding an ice cube against the area. When the gum is solid, it can be picked off or cut out of the coat. It may leave the dog's feet sore, in which case you should consult a veterinarian.

Cut Pads

Signs

- Sudden lameness
- Bleeding

Action

- If there is nothing sticking in the wound, apply a firm pressure bandage to control bleeding and then seek veterinary advice.
- If there is something sticking in the wound, such as glass, do not apply pressure directly onto the wound but rather try to apply pressure at the sides, if possible.

Cover loosely and seek veterinary attention.

NOTE: Never use a tourniquet.

Also be careful not to bend a claw when bandaging.

4.7 Injured Eye

Signs

- One eye kept closed
- Discharge from eye
- Pawing at eye
- Rubbing his/her face on the floor

Action

- Prevent dog from rubbing eye.
- Rinse eye with clean lukewarm water.
- Seek veterinary attention as soon as possible.

4.8 Burns and Scalds

Burns are caused by dry heat – for example, cigarettes or lying too close to a fire.

Scalds are caused by wet heat – for example, hot water or fat.

General – Action

- Cool the area as soon as possible with cold water.
- Keep the dog quiet and warm.
- Seek veterinary advice immediately, even if the injury is apparently minor. The full extent of the damage may not be visible.

Chemical Burns – Action

- Remove the chemical by rinsing with copious amounts of cool water. Pay particular attention to rinsing the eyes.
- Identify the chemical and, if possible, take the container or its label with the dog to the vet.

Scalding with Hot Fat – Action

Remove as much fat as possible using soap or detergent before applying cold water. If left on the coat, the fat will congeal and form an insulating layer that will hold heat in the coat and thus make the condition worse.

Electrical Burns – Action

Switch off the power supply before attempting any sort of treatment. If this is not possible, try to move the dog away from the power supply with a broom handle or other non-conductive material. If the dog is unconscious, keep his/her airway open by pulling his/her tongue forward.

NEVER TRY TO RESCUE A DOG THAT IS IN CONTACT WITH HIGH VOLTAGE ELECTRICITY CABLES. STAND WELL CLEAR AND CONTACT THE AUTHORITIES.

4.9 Choking

Signs

- Retching
- Coughing
- Difficulty breathing
- Collapse

THIS IS A SERIOUS EMERGENCY. SEEK VETERINARY ADVICE IMMEDIATELY.

It is dangerous to throw balls or small toys for dogs. If caught in mid-air, they can get stuck in the gullet and cause suffocation. When buying toys for dogs, make sure they are large enough not to be swallowed and that they are indestructible!

Never throw sticks for your dog. They can stick into the ground as they land, and the dog may then run onto them, causing serious injury to his/her mouth, throat, and chest.

4.10 Poisoning

If you suspect that your dog has been in contact with any type of poison, contact your veterinarian immediately.

If possible, take the packet or a sample of the poison with you when you go to the vet. If you do not know what the dog has had, take samples of his/her vomit with you to help the vet identify the substance.

DO NOT MAKE YOUR DOG VOMIT UNLESS YOUR VET ADVISES YOU TO DO SO. IN CASE OF CORROSIVE POISONING, CAUSING YOUR DOG TO VOMIT WILL MAKE THE SITUATION WORSE.

Many pet dogs are poisoned every year and owners should be aware of the dangers. Keep all tablets, weed killers, slug pellets, etc., out of reach of the dog and away from food storage. Select free running areas carefully, since farmers may use vermin poisons on their land.

Scavenging on the part of Guide Dogs can prove fatal.

4.11 Stings and Snake Bites

Signs

- Sudden pain and irritation
- Swelling
- If near throat, breathing may become difficult

Stings – Action

- Remove stinger carefully, if visible.
- Bathe swelling with cold water.
- If the sting is near the mouth or throat, contact your veterinarian immediately.

Snake Bites – Action

- Keep the dog warm and quiet.
- Contact your vet immediately.
- Do not attempt to suck out the poison.
- Bathe the swelling with cold water but do not rub the area.
- If breathing is difficult, keep the tongue forward to maintain an airway.

If you are sure which type of sting the dog has, treatment can be more specific:

- **Wasp sting** – bathe area with vinegar
- **Bee sting** – bathe area with bicarbonate of soda

4.12 Allergic Reactions

Signs

- Sudden appearance of raised blotches on head and front legs
- Thickening of ear flaps
- Thickening of gums
- Swelling around eyes

The sudden appearance of these symptoms is quite worrying but it is rarely a dangerous condition providing the swelling is not obstructing the dog's airway. Your vet should be contacted at once to administer an antihistamine, which will reduce the swelling.

4.13 Blocked Anal Glands

Signs

- Scooting (rubbing anus on floor)
- Chewing back end, tail, etc.
- Chewing feet
- Foul smell
- General discomfort around anal region

Action

Seek veterinary advice. The vet can empty these glands quickly and easily. If left untreated, a painful infection or abscess may form. The vet may also advise modification of the diet if the problem is persistent.

4.14 Heatstroke and Hyperthermia

Dog has absorbed too much heat and cannot regulate its body temperature or normal body functions. Heatstroke can cause damage to the muscles, organs and metabolic process. Can develop into hyperthermia, a life threatening condition, in as little as 20 minutes and requires immediate medical treatment. Heatstroke and hyperthermia can occur when a dog is confined to a small enclosed space during high temperatures and with poor ventilation, moved from a cold to a warmer or more humid climate, during seasonal temperature highs or after work, exercise or play in hot weather.

Prevention

- During hot days try to work in the morning or evening, avoid the middle of the day. If have to work in middle of day or in excessive heat try working indoors and on shaded routes.
- Avoid work, exercise and play during peak temperatures. Also, when outside, opt for shady areas.
- Give your dog plenty of breaks if it seems to be getting tired or hot quickly. Monitor closely in this case.
- Keep fresh, cool water available at all times.

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- Never leave your dog alone in the car on a warm day, regardless of whether the windows are open – temperatures inside cars can rise to dangerously high levels in a matter of minutes.

Signs

- Not walking out or slowing down on walk
- Not working as carefully as usual
- Slow to do tasks
- Agitation, whining, barking or anxiety
- Excessive or fluctuating panting
- Drooling (hypersalivation)
- Foaming at the mouth
- Dry tacky gums
- Little to no urination
- Labored or difficult breathing (dyspnea)
- Restlessness.

Signs of a Progression to Hyperthermia

Vomiting and/or diarrhea

Confusion

Lack of Muscular Coordination (ataxia)

Lying down and unwilling or unable to get up

Collapse and/or loss of consciousness

Red gums

Uncontrolled Tremors

Action

Veterinary care is needed to prevent serious side effects and death.

Contact a Veterinarian and alert to situation and give them your anticipated time of arrival.

Remove dog from source of heat – take into shade or indoors, offer cool water.

Spray or immerse dog with/in cool water (cool, not cold)

Use fans or cooling pads to cool dog via convection cooling

Use isopropyl (rubbing) alcohol soaked cotton balls and rub on foot pads, under the armpits and on the groin and flank areas to cool via evaporation.

Monitor dog's rectal temperature if possible, stop cooling procedures once temperature decreases to 103 degrees.

Do not immerse dog in ice or ice cold water – cooling too quickly can cause blood vessel restriction which can impede heat dissipation.

****Note – Age, Obesity, and possessing a thick coat are all risk factors of heat stroke and hyperthermia. Be careful if your dog possesses any of these risk factors.**