

First Aid for Cats

Poison Control for Animals - 1-800-548-2423

Taking Vital Signs - Know What is Normal

Whenever a cat is sick or injured, owners tend to panic because they do not know what to do. The first rule is to STAY CALM! You cannot help your pet if you panic. The next step is to call a veterinarian. There are things you can check to assist your vet. EVERYONE should know how to take vital signs of their cat.

- **Mucus membranes** - Get to know the normal color of your cat's gums. They are normally more pale pink than a dog. Some have pigmented gums - look at the roof and back of the mouth or under the tongue.
- **Capillary Refill Time** - When you press on their gums and lift up it causes the area to turn white. It normally takes 1-2 seconds for the pink to return. Press and lift up, counting the seconds for color to return.
- **Dehydration** - There are 2 ways to check and both should be done. Pick up the skin over the spine and let it go - it should snap back into place. If it does not, they may be dehydrated. Next, run a finger along their gums - they should be moist on the first swipe. Stickiness indicates probable dehydration.
- **Temperature** - We recommend a digital thermometer because it reads faster and beeps when done. Place Vaseline on the tip, turn it on and insert the first inch into the rectum angling 30° from the tail. Normal is 100.0° - 102.5°.
- **Pulse (heart rate)** - You can feel your cat's heart beat or use a stethoscope. The best area is where the point of their elbow when fixed overlaps the chest. It is easier to hear on the right side. Count for 60 seconds. Normal is 140-180, so count fast.
- **Respiration** - Count for 60 seconds. Normal is 20-30 breaths per minute.

Common Emergencies

- **Bleeding:** To stop bleeding, apply direct pressure with a gauze pad on the area. If severs, wrap the area if possible with a stretch bandage and/or tape. Take to the veterinarian ASAP.
- **Blocked Cat:** Any male cat (occasionally females) that is straining to urinate in the litterbox is a potential emergency. Cats can form crystals in their urine and these can lodge in their urethra causing an obstruction. Female cats can become obstructed from bladder stones. These conditions are primarily related to diet. Contact your vet for advice on the best diet for your cat.
- **Breaks:** If you suspect your cat has a broken bone, place him in a padded carrier or box to minimize his movement. Excessive movement can worsen the break. Take to a hospital immediately.

- **Cat Fights:** Inspect your cat for wounds. Clean the areas with hydrogen peroxide. If mild, clean with diluted betadine solution (dilute to the color of weak tea). The betadine will sting so make sure someone is helping hold the cat. If the wound is superficial, you may apply some antibiotic ointment. If you have oral antibiotics from your veterinarian - **START**. Apply hot packs to the areas twice daily. Make sure you take your cat to your vet - infection can seed, especially in the chest area, and cause severe illness in days to weeks.
- **Choking:** Contrary to popular belief, cats will ingest objects that can lodge in their throat. If your cat has something caught in his/her throat, they will gag, paw at their mouth, and may appear in respiratory distress. First try to look in the back of their mouth for the object and remove it. If the object is sharp such as a needle or bone and the cat can breathe and his gum color is normal, do not remove the object. **TAKE HIM/HER TO THE VET IMMEDIATELY**. Otherwise, if you cannot remove or see the object, perform the Heimlich maneuver. Place your cat on his/her side, support the spine with one hand and with the other push down and forward behind the ribs several times. If the object is dislodged, you must still take your cat to the vet for possible secondary problems.
- **CPR:** CPR is compressing the heart while administering artificial breathing. You only do this if your cat's heart has stopped! First hold the cat with one hand. With the other hand, place the thumb on the chest at the point of the elbow and wrap the other fingers around the other side of the chest. Squeeze GENTLY but FIRMLY at a rate of one compression per second. COUNT OUT LOUD! After 5 compressions, give them a breath. Hold the mouth closed and put your mouth over the muzzle covering the nostrils and gently breath into the nostrils for 3 seconds. Stop for 2 seconds, then repeat. Restart the chest compressions. Always feel for the heart to start beating. Stop the compressions when the heart beat returns. Continue the artificial respirations until he/she starts breathing. You can continue this procedure for up to 30 minutes.
- **Electrical Shock:** Keep electrical cords covered with plastic covers found at the hardware store. You can try putting unpleasant tasting substances on them such as Tabasco or eucalyptus oil. Cats with electrical shock can have burns in and around the mouth, seizures, respiratory problems and possible death. If you suspect electrical shock, get to the nearest hospital. If needed - start CPR.
- **Fevers:** If your cat is running a fever (normal 100.0° - 102.5°), you need to see the vet. If the fever is greater than 104.5°, you may lower the temperature by applying alcohol to the ears and pads of the feet. Continue to monitor the temperature so it does not drop below normal. See your vet! Do not use Tylenol or Advil - it can kill cats!
- **HBC (Hit by Car):** If an animal has been hit by a car, there are certain precautions you must take. An injured animal is frightened and in pain and they may bite you. Muzzle a dog before moving or examining them. Use a leash to handle them if they can walk. When picking up a cat, you can use leather gloves or wrap a thick towel or blanket around them, and then place into a carrier or sturdy box. Get to know veterinarians who will take in and treat stray animals.

- **Poisoning:** If you suspect ingestion of poison, have the label or name of the substance/plant and call a veterinarian or Poison Control for Animals (1-800-548-2423). Let the veterinarian know what you have in your emergency kit. Do not initiate treatment without instructions to do so - you could inadvertently cause more harm.

