



Basic Pet First Aid

First things first, if you are worried about your pet for whatever reason – they aren't themselves, are not acting right, or simply not finishing their meal – it is NEVER wrong to take them to the vet to get them checked out. Best case scenario everything is fine; but if we can detect a problem early, treatment usually has a better outcome.

Let's talk about some common scenarios in which you may be called upon for first aid. Remember, just like in people, first aid is used to stabilize the pet before you can get to the vet.

What to Have

Everybody should have a basic pet aid station in their house. You should probably carry most of this when you are out on a walk or going to the dog park. The most important thing is a water bottle filled with water – this helps with cleaning wounds, breaking up dog fights, and cooling dogs off. You should also have some wet wipes or gauze to help clean any wounds and/or debris off the coat. A stretchy bandage (called vet wrap in the vet industry, but you can find it online as well by many other names) is crucial, as is some clean gauze for wounds. Betadine or chlorhexidine can help clean wounds.

Triple antibiotic ointment (basically, an antibiotic cream that is available over the counter) is useful for minor scrapes and wounds as well. A muzzle is helpful, but you can also use a long piece of gauze or a scarf. Medications to keep at hand include a good probiotic (excellent for diarrhea). A fast-reading digital thermometer should be on hand, as well as some Vaseline or lube in case you need to check temperature. I do not recommend giving medications unless you have been "okayed" to do so by your veterinarian. Remember, many OTC medications that we can take are deadly to dogs and cats including ibuprofen and Tylenol– if in doubt, do NOT give them to your pet!

Need to Know

Basic first aid is important, but please remember to take care of yourself as well. When a pet is in pain, they will bite – even the nicest pet in the world will react to pain in a negative way. Therefore, make sure you are safe before proceeding to administer first aid. If it's a dog who is hurt, you can use a long scarf or piece of gauze or muzzle to muzzle them and prevent bites. People who do not know how to handle pets should stay clear of the scenario (especially kids).



Smaller Wounds

A common scenario that you can run into is a dog tearing off their nail. This can happen when running, or even at home if they get their nail stuck and keep running. There will be a lot of blood. They will limp and it is very uncomfortable. First, get your pet contained in a small room or with a leash. Approach them slowly. They will be in pain and will not react like normal. Try to control their head. Once you have your pet in a good position, you can wrap the foot. Put some gauze (or tissue or toilet paper – anything clean to stop the bleeding) on the wound (they will not like you touching it, so please be gentle). Use the stretchy bandage to wrap the gauze in place. Make sure to wrap the bandage tightly enough so that it will stay in place, but not so tightly that it cuts off blood flow. If you can just fit a finger underneath the bandage, that is usually the right tightness. Once it is wrapped, keep your pet calm and bring them to the local vet so that they can remove the hanging nail (if necessary) and see if antibiotics are needed. If you don't have a stretchy bandage, you can try using a sock to keep the tissue in place. You can use tape to keep the sock on, but do not apply the tape directly to the skin/fur – it will hurt like heck getting it off! Just use masking tape to tighten the sock so it stays on.

For other minor wounds, such as dog bites – try to clean the area with water as much as possible. Do not apply alcohol directly to the wound as this is very painful. In general, for a minor wound, such as a dog bite, apply pressure to the area to get it to stop bleeding. If it is deep enough that you can see through the skin, they need to be brought directly to the vet. If it is minor and stops bleeding quickly, it should be fine, but it is never wrong to get it checked out. Dog bite and cat bite wounds usually look less dramatic than they really are – you may just see a small puncture wound, but the damage done to the tissue underneath can be devastating. You can bandage the area (if possible), but if not (such as on the flank), simply keep pressure there to stop the bleeding, wash it off with clean water and bring to the vet. If your pet starts limping, don't try to push them to use the leg – let them be and encourage them to rest.

Snake Bites

Snake bites are very common in Hong Kong. Honestly, the best thing you can do for a snake bite is put some gauze on the wound (to prevent the blood from going everywhere) and bring them directly to the vet for antivenin. Try to take a picture of the snake or at least be able to describe it (if you see it), but don't waste time trying to catch the snake. Usually, you won't see the snake. The dog will either scream out and come running back to you or come in from outside limping or acting painful (cats can get bitten by snakes too, but this is much less common).



Heat Stroke

Heat stroke is incredibly common in tropical areas. The best treatment for heat stroke is prevention. Therefore, do not bring your dogs out in the hottest time of the day nor encourage them to run too far, especially short nosed (brachycephalic) dogs. Brachycephalic dogs will never want to be too far from air conditioning. Signs of heat stroke include panting, labored breathing, collapse, red tongue and gums, inability to move. If you suspect heat stroke, make sure to give the dog water (not too cold – room temperature is fine). Move them into the shade and/or air conditioning. Try to cool them down with a fan or wet towels. Do not throw them into an ice-cold bath – if you cool them too quickly, they can get much worse. Bring them to the veterinarian in an air-conditioned car. Do NOT feed them – they don't need to eat, they need to cool down.

For more information on heat stroke, please see my latest infographic on Heat Stroke in Dogs: The Best Treatments is Prevention — <https://www.dr.lawrenvet.com/insights/heat-stroke-in-dogs-the-best-treatments-is-prevention>

Difficulty Breathing

CPR is rarely successful for cats and dogs, even in a veterinary hospital setting. However, if your pet stops breathing, you can try. First, make sure that the pet is actually not breathing. Try talking to it and petting it to see if they wake up. Then, make sure that there is nothing blocking the airway. Open their mouth, gently pull out the tongue, and sweep your finger inside to see if anything is stuck. Please note – there is a firm tissue called the hyoid apparatus near the opening to the trachea. Don't pull on this. It is normal. Sometimes they'll start to breathe on their own with this stimulation. If they don't, cover the mouth and forcefully blow into their nostrils. You have to blow hard, especially for big dogs. Force air into the lungs and watch the chest to see it gets bigger. Give 3-5 breathes, then see if they will breathe on their own. Give 10 breaths per minute. IF the heart is not beating (check the pulse by holding up high near the thigh), put the pet in right side down and start pressuring on the chest with both hands. Do this 100-120 times per minute. If there is only one person, give 2 breaths after every 30 compressions. If you have two people, coordinate a breath giver with a chest compressor. Continue until you become exhausted or you have the pet at a vet practice. There is a pet ambulance in Hong Kong – PET AMBULANCE/Pet Club HK 97388103 or 24809234.



Ingestion

If your pet eats something they shouldn't, it is common for people to want to get them to vomit it up at home. If you go on the internet, you'll find at home remedies to make a dog or cat vomit – hydrogen peroxide or feeding high salt water. I do not recommend either of those options if there is any way to get to a vet (and in Hong Kong, there is almost always a vet very close by).

A Sting

If your pet is stung by a bee, wasp or spider, try to scrape out the stinger using a credit card or other stiff material or tweezers. Apply a cold compress. You can apply a mixture of water and baking soda to the area as a paste. If you notice swelling, breathing difficulty, or collapse, they should be brought to a vet immediately.

For similar content on keeping your pet safe, take a look at my article "*Top Tips! Pet Proofing Your Home*" <https://www.drlawrenvet.com/insights/top-tips-pet-proofing-your-home>.