

First Aid For Your Pets in 60 minutes!

By Dr Rob Miller

The following notes are not meant to be exhaustive but cover common things I think are useful, or issues that get asked about in the consulting room.

Vomiting and Diarrhoea

Dogs and cats can vomit / develop diarrhoea for many different reasons. Probably the most common cause is dietary indiscretion.

Unless the clinical examination or history reveals a specific cause we will often begin treatment on a symptomatic level.

This involves the following advice:

- Starve your pet for 24 hours, but offer water little and often (consider ice cubes for vomiters to prevent volume overload).
- Thereafter feed boiled Chicken and Rice for 2-3 days (1:3 mixture). For large intestinal diarrhoea, use brown rice. (You can buy Hill's i/d off the shelf if you wish)
- Only offer water to drink (no milk products).
- Use an anti-vomiting / Diarrhoea mixture: Worthwhile having in your pet's first aid box. Eg. Peptosyl, dose twice daily for 2-3 days.
- If not wormed in the last 4 weeks do so again. Do this 2-4 hours after initial treatment has commenced.

See your vet if the patient worsens or is just not responding.

Inducing vomiting (Emesis)

Particularly useful in the dog as they tend to eat anything!
Particularly important if you believe your dog has ingested something potentially poisonous.

Ipecac syrup can be useful. Give 2-6 ml by mouth. But be aware it takes 30-60 min to work.

A concentrated salt solution may be more to hand. Dissolve salt into a cup of warm water until no more dissolves, give by mouth.

If all this fails see your vet as we use apomorphine by injection which induces vomiting within a few minutes. Nurses love this job.

Examples of use:

Dog eats:

Blood and bone

Snail bait

Rat bait

1080 poison for foxes

Chocolate in excess

Wound or eye bathing

Use Normal Saline (N-Saline) lukewarm (body temperature).

Because it is isotonic with body fluids and at body temperature it does not sting, try it in your own eye next time it needs flushing!

You can use it for:

- *Wound bathing*, eg. A cut paw. Place the paw in a bowl of n-saline and give a good shake to loosen any dirt particles. Pad dry.
- *Eye bathing*. Bathe downwards and medially. Use a separate clean swab for each eye. You can use a 5ml syringe to squirt n-saline into eye if you feel there is foreign material lodged there.

N-Saline is easily made up and stored in the fridge.

Warm it to body temperature in a microwave before using (test temperature on back of your hand). The formula is simple:

- 1-teaspoon salt in 600 ml (1 pint) of warm water.
- Ensure the salt is completely dissolved.

Skin Issues

Skin issues are very common in the dog, less so in the cat.

Simple things you can do to see if an issue will self-resolve are:

- Shampoo with Veterinary oatmeal shampoo (eg Episoothe or Aloveen).
- Be sure to leave it on for 10 minutes before rinsing off, think about apply an oatmeal conditioner (Aloveen, Episoothe)
- Try an antihistamine: e.g. Claratyn 10 mg tablets. One for each 20 kg of dog once daily.
- For acute hotspots you will need to see the vet, but in the short term try applying a cold compress (crushed ice in a tea towel) as this will help take the sting/itch out for a short period and offers a degree of pain relief.

The Tape Muzzle

Most people do not keep a muzzle handy for their dog; however they can prove very useful for administering certain treatments to the fractious patient, as they prevent you getting bitten!

Examples include:

- Painful ears and the need to apply drops.
- Painful limb and you need to pick them up. Particularly when a pet has a broken limb and you need to apply a support dressing or splint to get them to the vet with minimal pain.
- Removing Bee stingers.
- Clipping nails.

With the assistance of a nurse and willing (or not so willing) patient we will show how to apply the muzzle. (See Fig 1)

Bee and Wasp Stings

Common in summer and late autumn.

Bee Stings

- Remove the stinger as soon as possible (if removed within 15 sec severity is much less). A tape muzzle can be useful as described above.
- Apply a compress made up of a paste of baking soda.
- Try an antiperspirant if you have no baking soda. Aluminium chlorohydrate reduces the effect of bee venom.
- Apply cold! Use ice or cool water for 10 to 30 minutes after the sting.
- An antihistamine such as Benadryl, taken by mouth (Child's dose for a 20-30 kg dog), can give some added relief and help prevent the reaction from spreading.
- If you have a cortisone cream lying about the house it can also provide some symptomatic relief.

Wasp Sting

- Take a cotton ball and apply vinegar (white or apple) or pickle juice to the area. (This will reduce swelling.)

Other over the counter medications that work well are:

- hydrocortisone 1%
- benzocaine spray
- antihistamine creams

If your pet is having a severe reaction (e.g. collapse, breathing difficulties) then see your veterinarian as soon as possible.

Dressing a limb

A dressing can be placed upon a limb that has either been cut or traumatised (eg ligament pull, possible fracture.) If bleeding, the pressure of the dressing will control the bleed to a degree until you can see your vet.

We do not recommend tourniquets, as a pressure dressing should be sufficient until you can get to the vet.

For the dressing have the following on hand in your first aid box:

- Anti-stick dressing
- gauze swabs
- Conforming gauze bandage
- Sticky dressing, such as Leukoplast elastic.

Applying the dressing:

- Cleanse the wound using n-saline (as above). Dry.
- Apply a non-stick dressing over wound (this ensures the dressing is not painful to remove!)

- Apply a few swabs for absorbency over wound.
- Dress with the conforming dressing.
- Use sticky dressing to attach conforming dressing at the top. (Never use elastic bands; they can lead to terrible injuries if forgotten!)
- See you vet!

Note that we do not recommend clients buying or using stretchy elasticised dressings such as Vetwrap, since they are easily applied incorrectly and can lead to severe swelling and possible gangrene.

Tourniquets

These are best forgotten about except in exceptional circumstances as described here.

Bleeding

We do not recommend tourniquets for general bleeding, as they are easily applied incorrectly and can lead to significant damage. Apply a pressure dressing as described above and see your vet.

An exception to this is an amputation where a large amount of arterial blood (bright red, and pumping) can be lost in no time from the stump. In these cases apply a very tight tourniquet as close to the end of the limb as possible. Use the double throw, single throw method to ensure it does not slip. The tourniquet can be made from anything, string, rubber bands or torn from the hem of a dress of a nearby maiden (as in the movies!).

Snake bites

If correctly applied a tourniquet can be life saving. Snake poisons often act quickly and give you little time to get to the vet. Applying a tourniquet towards the body above the bite wound ASAP will restrict the spread of the toxin to the rest of the body. The tourniquet can remain in situ for a maximum of 20 min before tissue death starts to occur. However as bites can often be fatal this is the lesser of two evils.

In the case of snake bites always head for a veterinary emergency centre such as NSVEC as most GP vets are unlikely to stock the required antisera needed to save your pet. A trip to the wrong location could lose you precious time. So, call ahead to your vets who will advise you where to head.

Antiseptics

The main message here is do not use Dettol in cats and dogs. Unlike us they will try to lick the medication off, and dettol can and does cause severe, painful ulcers on the tongue.

If a cat walks through a disinfectant you have mopped with consider wiping their feet for them, rather than allowing them to groom it off.

If you need a safe antiseptic consider Hibicleanse, available at your vet.

Drowning

Dogs and cats do drown. Typically in swimming pools but I have seen a cat drown in a bath that was left full for the day. The cat being old and frail fell in and could not extricate itself and thus drowned. The clients felt very guilty. So the message here is again prevention:

- Closing off easy access of a dog to a swimming pool
- Do not leave sinks or baths full when you leave the house
- Do not leave toilet lids up!

CPR can be attempted, see below.

CPR

This is not impossible but difficult due to the shape of your pet's mouth relative to yours.

In a hospital setting we will intubate a dog or cat and provide oxygen. Obviously at home or outdoors the best you can do is cup the mouth of the animal and blow to make the chest rise. Combine this with Cardiac massage, 4 compressions to one breath (one breath / 2 seconds). Lay the patient laterally and pad up the lower aspect of the chest. Perform compressions to the chest about 2/3rds the way down from the spine and just behind the elbow.

Ticks

The number one thing here is prevention. Daily tick searching and product application to reduce tick pick up are the mainstay. Eg Advantix or Frontline applied every 2 weekly or KillTix collars.

Tick hooks are a very useful item to have in your first aid box as they allow you to remove a tick easily and completely.

Diabetics and hypoglycaemias

Your normal sugar is called Sucrose. This is no good in an emergency, as sucrose needs to be metabolised to glucose before it can work.

Glucose in pure form should be given as a solution, eg Glucodin powder made up as a saturated solution. This is available from any pharmacy and should always be available.

Signs of a "hypo" are typically where the animal is moving slowly, staring into space, or if severe, comatose and cannot be roused.

If you have a diabetic pet and if in doubt it is best to assume a hypo is occurring, you cannot kill them with glucose!

Administer into the mouth with a syringe, 5 ml aliquots (or a tablespoon if you do not have a syringe).

Glucose starts to absorb through the mucous membranes of the mouth and gets into the blood stream rapidly.

Fits

We all want to help, but when an animal having a fit the best thing to do is not have one yourself. Remain calm!

- Remember there is nothing you can do to make it shorter (unless your vet has supplied you with a Valium injection for just such an occasion).
- Keep out of the way until the fitting ceases. Cuddling, stroking or talking to the animal can cause the fit to be prolonged.
- Obviously remove objects from around the animal that they could hurt themselves on.
- They may pass urine / faeces. This is normal.
- Remember during a fit it may look terrible to you but the patient is unconscious, unaware and not in pain.
- Contact your vet following a fit, particularly if this is the first time it has ever occurred.

Epilepsy is the most common cause of fitting in pets.

Bones or sticks stuck in the mouth.

Not an uncommon problem! The dog (sometimes a cat) is brought in, in a panic.

Don't panic Mr Mannering!

Either the bone is stuck on a tooth (tooth in marrow cavity) or the bone or stick is arched across the roof of the mouth (dog) or a wishbone is trapped in the pharynx (cat) both are frantic to try and remove it.

A suitable pair of pliers is all you need to remedy this situation in the dog. There is usually an opportunity to grab the offending object, as the dog cannot close its mouth. At the vet we have longer thinner artery forceps that work best. For the cat, usually a brief anaesthetic is required to retrieve the bone fragment.

Fishhooks in the mouth

Do not try pulling it out as you could cause a lot of damage! You do not know where it is embedded.

Obviously you need to see the vet but the main message here is DO NOT REMOVE any visible fishing line. It can help us remove the hook easily. Without a line they will need surgery which is much more expensive and time consuming.

Constipation

Your pet is straining to pass faeces, nothing is happening! What to do?

First ensure you pet is trying to defecate! Some animals are actually trying to urinate but cannot. This is an emergency, so see your vet immediately.

If it is just constipation you can try:

Catlax in the cat, again worth having in your first aid box. A good mouth full daily for 2-3 days should do the trick. If this does not work see the vet as cats can become severely constipated and may need an enema under a general anaesthetic to get them unblocked (typically the older cat).

In the dog try a child's dose of liquid paraffin daily for a few days. Liquid paraffin can be dangerous if inhaled. Spoon into the side of the jaw and allow them to swallow it at their own pace.

Bones can be a big cause of constipation in dogs, so stop feeding them if they cause such issues. Use more digestible products to keep their teeth clean, eg Greenies, Pigs ears, t/d diet.

Swallowing of a non-digestible object (foreign Body, FB)...

Either it will pass or get stuck.

This can be a difficult thing to identify, as the patient cannot tell us what it has done. Often the object is ingested out of sight of the owner who has no knowledge of it. Only at a later stage is it obvious something is not quite right. If it gets stuck they pet will eventually begin to vomit. However the intractable vomiting patient may be doing so for many reasons! It can take a lot of investigation to be sure it is due to something stuck internally. Many FB's do not show up on plain x-rays, are too soft to feel through the abdominal wall, and contrast x-ray studies are required.

Locating and removing foreign bodies can be a very expensive procedure so it is best to try and avoid allowing you pet to swallow anything other than food!

Fig 1

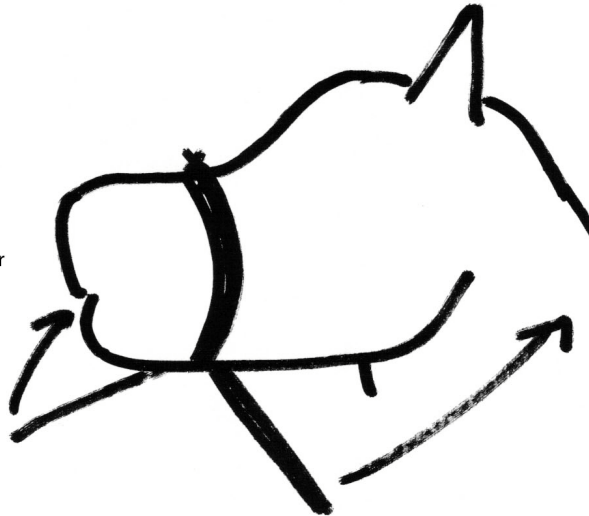


Form a loop



Take under the chin

Tie a ribbon knot behind the head for easy release



First Aid Box

1. Peptosyl for simple diarrhoea or vomiting
2. Ipecac syrup / Saturated salt solution for inducing vomiting.
3. N-saline (1 tsp to 600 ml warm water) for wound / eye bathing
4. 5 ml syringe
5. Oatmeal shampoo
6. A few Claratyn tablets
7. Tape for a tape muzzle (or a proper muzzle)
8. Tweezers for stinger removal
9. Hydrocortisone cream 1%
10. Anti-stick dressing
11. Gauze swabs
12. Conforming gauze bandage
13. Sticky dressing
14. Hibicleanse, for wound cleansing.
15. CPR Note: 1 breath / 2 sec. 4 compressions to heart / breath.
16. Tick hook
17. Glucodin solution (if you have a diabetic pet)
18. Valium injections (if you have an epileptic pet)
19. Katlax (if you have a cat or small dog)
20. Liquid paraffin (medium to larger dog)