



■ Overview

Pet first aid is the immediate care given to an injured or ill animal before professional veterinary treatment. The goal is to stabilize the animal, minimize pain and further injury, and safely transport to emergency care. First aid does not replace veterinary treatment — it is the bridge to it.

- ■ Even a gentle pet may bite when injured or in pain. Always approach a distressed animal slowly and consider a makeshift muzzle before handling.

■ ■ Situations Requiring Immediate Action

- Unconscious or unresponsive pet
- Active seizures lasting more than 2 minutes
- Severe or spurting bleeding
- Difficulty breathing / choking
- Suspected poisoning
- Eye injury or prolapse
- Suspected broken bones
- Bite wounds — especially to chest, abdomen, or neck
- Burns (thermal or chemical)
- Heat stroke

■ Body Science: Why Prompt Action Matters

Animals enter physiological shock faster than humans when injured. Shock — the failure of circulation to deliver adequate oxygen — can develop within minutes of severe blood loss, trauma, or anaphylaxis. Signs include pale gums, rapid weak pulse, cold extremities, and collapse. First aid that stops blood loss and keeps the animal warm directly prevents shock.

■ First Aid by Situation



Bleeding

- Apply firm, direct pressure with a clean cloth — do not remove once placed
- Elevate the limb above heart level if possible
- Do NOT use a tourniquet unless bleeding is truly uncontrollable
- Get to an ER — internal bleeding produces no visible wound but is equally deadly

Choking

- Look in the mouth — only remove visible objects you can safely reach
- Small dogs and cats: hold upside down briefly and give gentle back blows
- Larger dogs: stand behind, give firm upward abdominal thrusts
- If unconscious, begin CPR and go to ER immediately

Suspected Fracture

- Do not attempt to set or splint the bone
- Limit movement — use a flat board or rigid surface as a stretcher
- Muzzle the animal if needed — pain causes even gentle pets to bite
- Transport carefully, support the injured limb without bending it

Burns

- Cool water (not ice) over the burn for 5–10 minutes
- Do not apply butter, toothpaste, or any cream
- Cover loosely with a clean, damp cloth
- Chemical burns: flush with large amounts of water for 15+ minutes

Seizure

- Do not restrain the animal — move hazards away from it instead
- Time the seizure from start to finish
- Keep the environment quiet and dark
- Seizures lasting more than 2–3 minutes or multiple seizures = emergency

Eye Injury

- Do not touch, rub, or flush the eye without veterinary guidance
- If the eye appears to be protruding (prolapse), cover with a moist cloth immediately
- Even minor eye injuries can cause permanent vision loss — treat all as urgent



■ When to See a Veterinarian

■ **STAY CALM** — stress directly worsens outcomes. Pets are acutely sensitive to their owner's emotional state. Panic raises your pet's heart rate, worsens their pain response, and complicates exam and treatment. Take a breath. Speak softly and move with slow, deliberate efficiency. Getting to the ER calmly and quickly beats getting there panicked. **Your calm is part of the treatment.**

■ **THIS IS A VETERINARY EMERGENCY — GO NOW.** If your pet is showing any of the signs described in this guide, stop reading and drive directly to your nearest 24-hour emergency vet. Do not wait until morning. Do not call first. **Go immediately.**

■ First Aid Kit — What to Keep on Hand

- Gauze pads and rolls — for wound coverage and bandaging
- Self-adhesive bandage wrap (Vetrap/CoFlex)
- Digital rectal thermometer + lubricant (normal: 101–102.5°F dogs, 100.5–102.5°F cats)
- Sterile saline flush (wound cleaning)
- Blunt-tip scissors and tweezers
- Nitrile gloves
- Emergency vet contact number and address
- Pet carrier or blanket for transport

■ Prevention

✓ Take a pet first aid course. The American Red Cross and RECOVER Initiative offer hands-on training. Technique matters more than supplies.

■ Final Summary

First aid stabilizes — the emergency vet heals. Act quickly, stay calm, and get moving.

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■ Related XVC Guides:

- [Pet CPR Basics](#) · [Building a Pet Emergency Kit](#)
- [When to Go to the Emergency Vet](#) · [NYC Emergency Vet Hospitals](#)



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