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## Basic First Aid for Your Pet

Pet Column for the week of March 5, 2007

### [Office of Public Engagement](#)

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It's 7:00 on a Sunday evening and you walked into the kitchen just as Clyde, your retriever, finished off the bag of chocolate chips you had sitting on the counter. Isn't chocolate supposed to be poisonous for four-legged critters? What do you do? Who do you call? In your haste to help your pet, you are unable to summon a rational thought. If only you'd taken the time to put together that first aid kit that your veterinarian had recommended, you could have all of the supplies and information you need at your fingertips.

So you don't have to experience the angst that accompanies the above scenario, Dr. Melissa Riensche, a small animal internal medicine resident at the University of Illinois Veterinary Teaching Hospital, Urbana, Ill., recommends a small bit of advance preparation to provide you with most of the tools you need to deal with any animal emergency before a visit to your veterinarian.

Any pet first aid kit should include a list of important phone numbers. You'll always want to check in with your animal health professional before taking matters into your own hands, and it is oftentimes reassuring to simply speak with a trained pet health professional. The two phone numbers at the top of your list should be that of your local veterinarian and the local emergency clinic. You should also include the ASPCA's Animal Poison Control Center's phone number: 1-888-426-4435.

You should also have your pet's medical records readily available. These records will help you answer questions about your pet's current medications and dosages, any adverse reactions, and its current vaccination record--all things that an animal health professional will ask about when you call.

Since poisoning is a pet health emergency that provides a great deal of uncertainty for most pet owners, it's always a good idea to keep a few things on hand to deal with any situations that may arise. Your first aid kit should include a three percent hydrogen peroxide solution, which will induce vomiting in your pet.

Dr. Riensche reminds, "You should always consult a veterinarian or the poison control hotline before inducing vomiting because some substances can cause more damage on their way back out. It is important to seek help as soon as possible after the ingestion takes place because the sooner we can start treatment, the better the outcome."

If you suspect that your pet has consumed a poisonous item, you should first try to identify that which was consumed, when, and how much. Your next step is to call your veterinarian or the Animal Poison Control Center, all the while keeping your pet warm, calm, and quiet. Should a trip to your veterinarian be advised, you should take along the container or label with you.

Cuts or lacerations are also common pet health emergencies. To control the bleeding that accompanies these injuries, your first aid kit should include non-stick bandages, such as ACE-brand bandages, gauze, bandaging-material, and adhesive tape for wrapping wounds. A pet will also often bleed if its nails are clipped too short. Dr. Riensche recommends keeping cornstarch on hand, which acts as an anti-coagulant for bleeding toe nails. She says, "It is important not to put anything into other types of wounds as this can lead to infection or further damage to tissues."

Your first-aid kit need not include small adhesive bandages, creams, or ointments; these are all items that your pet will instinctively want to remove and will further complicate the situation at hand.

"Minor wounds can be dealt with at home by clipping the hairs around the wound with clippers--never scissors, and thoroughly rinsing the wound with water. Do not use alcohol or hydrogen peroxide here because these substances are damaging to the sensitive tissues below the skin. Even minor wounds should be reported to your veterinarian. For larger wounds, it is important to control the bleeding either with a clean, soft cloth or by bandaging, and follow-up with a visit to a veterinarian as soon as possible," says Dr. Riensche.

One of the most common injuries to a pet is an unfortunate interaction with an automobile. You'll want to have a board on hand to act as a stretcher and a towel or blanket to wrap around your pet, preventing it from going into shock.

As gentle and loving as your pet might normally be, an injured pet will often react out of fear or pain toward a caregiver. This makes it important to include simple restraint devices in your first aid kit. These include a muzzle to prevent your pet from biting you. You may also choose to include a lampshade collar, which will prevent your pet from licking a wound.

Vomiting and/or diarrhea are another common type of emergency you might encounter with your pet and can be caused by a variety of reasons: an intestinal parasite, an obstruction, or a simple virus. While monitoring the progression of your pet's stomach upset and any accompanying signs, such as weakness, pain, or agitation, you should consult your veterinarian for a treatment recommendation. To rule out other sources, she'll likely recommend an evaluation, including testing a stool sample and keeping your pet well hydrated.

Pets can succumb to heatstroke very quickly and must be treated quickly. If your pet's body temperature measures at 106 degrees or higher, begin by placing it in a tub of cool running water, paying special attention to the underside of its torso and inside its legs. Because it is possible to overcool your pet, you should stop cooling measures once your pet's temperature reaches 103 degrees. While continuing to monitor your pet's body temperature, you should then contact a veterinarian as soon as possible.

With a little advance preparation, you'll be able to relieve any suffering and possibly save your pet's life. For more information about first aid for your pet or preparing a first aid kit, contact your local veterinarian.