

FIRST AID FOR CATS



Emergencies often occur when we least expect them, but a little foresight and common sense will help you to deal with whatever occurs. Think ahead and have some simple supplies handy in case you need them. A pet first aid kit for cats should include:

- **Phone numbers/business card for us and/or for a local emergency clinic.** (*If you are out of town, you can still call us but you'll need to be aware of where the nearest veterinary clinic is.*)
- Thermometer
- Scissors
- Bandage material
- Styptic powder
- Neosporin or similar ointment
- Hydrogen peroxide
 - A syringe to administer it with is helpful
- Vomiting and diarrhea medications: Famotidine (Pepcid™)
- Diphenhydramine (Benadryl)
 - It must be just diphenhydramine without any decongestant added

Never give any human medication without calling us for dosage and safety information. Some human medications, including acetaminophen, are fatal to cats!

Call us anytime for advice on what to do in an emergency. If you know your pet needs to be seen, it may be faster to go directly to Lakeshore Veterinary Specialty & Emergency Hospital. They are able to offer a much better level of care after hours than we can. Just as the emergency room is the appropriate place to go if you are having a stroke or heart attack, Lakeshore is the most appropriate place to go for a serious after-hours emergency with your pet.

Emergencies that require immediate care, and for which home first aid is not sufficient include:

- Choking/gagging/retching/drooling/inability to swallow
- Labored, noisy or open-mouthed breathing
- Inability to urinate
- Severe vomiting
- Pain/screaming/moaning/inability to sleep comfortably
- Abnormal color to tongue or gums – pale, blue, jaundiced, dark red
- Bruising of gums or skin
- Distended or swollen abdomen
- Severe itching or scratching, especially if the skin is bleeding
- Severe cough or cough accompanied by lethargy or discolored gums
- Injury to the eye or face

The following are some of the most common emergencies we see, with advice on what to do.

1) Bladder problems

Symptoms include straining to urinate, urinating outside the litter box or being unable to urinate. **In male cats, this is always an emergency.** If there is a blockage in the penis and the cat is unable to urinate, he will usually die within 24 hours. In females, bladder problems can be uncomfortable but are usually not life threatening. If you notice symptoms in a male cat, he needs to be seen immediately. In a female cat, we may



request that you collect a urine sample at home and bring it here for analysis. Call us for instructions on how to do this. Don't confuse straining to urinate with constipation!

About 10% of cats will have urinary tract problems requiring treatment, making it one of the most common problems that we see. To prevent bladder diseases, feed a high quality food recommended by us, have fresh water available at all times, and keep the litter box clean,

to encourage frequent urination. If your cat already had bladder problems and a special diet has been prescribed, don't go back to feeding grocery store food! If you do, chances are good the problem will recur.

2) Poisoning - pills, ant traps, plants, etc.

Call us immediately! Depending on what it is, we may have you make your cat vomit, give another home remedy, call the poison control hotline for pets or rush your pet to the emergency center. **The poison control hotline number is (888) 426-4435. There is a fee for their services.**

Better than having a first aid kit or home remedies on hand is spending the time to pet-proof your home in the first place. Never leave medication containers where pets can get at them. Bedside tables, dressers, and kitchen counters are not good places to leave small items of any kind. We have heard countless times "I never thought he would try to eat that!" Keep cabinets and closets closed, pick up your kids' toys, and don't give your cat toys that aren't safe.

TOXIC HOUSE PLANTS & FLOWERS

<u>Name</u>	<u>Toxic Parts</u>	<u>Symptoms</u>
1. Asparagus Fern	uncooked berries, shoots, & sap	dermatitis; may cause severe blistering.
2. Caladium	all parts	burning, irritation of mouth and throat; may cause swelling of tongue and vomiting.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Toxic Parts</u>	<u>Symptoms</u>
3. Castor Bean	seeds	burning in mouth, throat & stomach; severe vomiting & diarrhea; symptoms may delay hours or days.
4. Dieffenbachia	all parts	burning, irritation of mouth & throat; may cause swelling & blockage of air passages.
5. Easter lily	leaves, flowers, pollen grains	acute renal failure and death.
6. Philodendron	all parts	burning, irritation of mouth & throat; swelling.
7. Mother-in-Law's tongue	all parts	severe burning sensation in mouth & throat.
8. Delphinium	seeds and young plants	vomiting, irregular heartbeat, blurred vision, depression, convulsions.
9. Foxglove	all parts	vomiting, irregular heartbeat, mental confusion
10. Holly	berries	vomiting & diarrhea, depending on type and maturity of the plant.
11. Jessamine	all parts	sweating, convulsions, breathing difficulties, coma.
12. Lantana	all parts, especially green berries	vomiting, diarrhea, weakness, staggering, blurred vision.
13. Lily of the Valley	all parts	irregular heartbeat, mental confusion, vomiting.
14. Mistletoe	berries	cramps, vomiting, diarrhea, slow heartbeat.
15. Narcissus	bulb	vomiting, diarrhea, trembling, convulsions.
16. Sweet Pea	pea, seed	slow heartbeat & breathing, convulsions.

3) Cuts, bite wounds and abscesses

These run the gamut from superficial scrapes to gaping wounds and deep punctures. They can bleed a little or a lot. In general, if the cut is small and bleeding has stopped, it can probably wait until the next day. If muscles, tissue, or tendon is exposed it will probably need sutures. Sometimes we can do this with local anesthesia and a few skin staples. Antibiotics and pain medication will be needed.

Call us and we will help you decide if the injury requires the pet to be seen, and if so, how urgently. Bleeding that cannot be controlled is always urgent. Wounds that could have punctured the chest, abdomen or airway are also always critical.

Bite wounds are usually a serious concern as far as infection risk. There can often be extensive damage to muscles and other tissue underneath the skin, even if the skin puncture is small. In severe cases surgery is imperative and your pet will need drains placed pain medications and treatment for bruising and swelling.

Small puncture or claw wounds will usually form abscesses. Cat skin heals small wounds quickly, which traps bacteria inside. These bacteria multiply rapidly, and the immune system sends in lots of white blood cells to fight the infection. The cat usually has a fever and the infected area is quite painful. A firm swelling will form, which will usually soften and burst open within a few days, releasing thick, reddish pus.

Cats usually feel better once the abscess has opened and drained. The fever comes down and the pain lessens. The skin often again heals too quickly with bacteria still inside and the abscess will reform. Until the wound is cleaned and flushed, and antibiotics are administered, healing does not occur.



4) Vomiting

There are over 100 different causes of vomiting and diarrhea in pets, ranging from minor digestive upset to life threatening intestinal ruptures. The sicker the pet seems to feel, the more he or she vomits or the greater the quantity of vomit produced the more urgently we need to see your cat. Vomiting blood or bile is usually more serious than vomiting foam or food.

Cats, especially young ones, are likely to play with items that are dangerous if swallowed, including string, thread, dental floss, plants, pieces of toys, or medication they are batting around the floor. Intestinal obstructions from foreign objects are common in inquisitive felines. If your cat is vomiting, it's usually best to call us for advice or to schedule an exam sooner, rather than later. The longer you wait, the sicker your pet will become and the more expensive treatment will be.

Most cats vomit a hairball occasionally. However, frequent hairball vomiting almost always means a cat is suffering from intestinal disease, such as inflammatory bowel disease. A normal cat should not vomit more than a few times a year. Hairballs are very uncomfortable for your cat and can also indicate a serious problem. Chronic vomiting should be investigated!

5) Diarrhea

Acute diarrhea is uncommon in adult cats but common in kittens, usually due to intestinal parasites. Save a sample in the refrigerator and bring it in to us. Many times that's all we need to look at to diagnose the problem. Without it, we can't tell what medication will be needed.

If your cat is eating well and acting OK otherwise, we can often examine the stool sample and dispense medication. If your pet is feeling ill, vomiting, is a kitten, or has other serious health issues, we will probably want to see your pet. We cannot dispense prescription medications without having seen the pet for an examination within the past year.

Home care will usually include feeding small, frequent meals until the cat is feeling better. Either feed prescription food for digestive upsets or a bland protein source such as chicken or ham baby food.

As with chronic vomiting, chronic diarrhea is an important symptom and should be investigated.

6) Lameness

Mild lameness is not an emergency. Rest and perhaps some pain medication are usually required. Many human anti-inflammatory drugs are not safe for pets, especially cats. Don't give any human medications to pets without calling us first!

Restrict exercise until your pet is no longer lame and then for at least a few extra days. The longer a pet is lame, the slower he or she should return to usual activities. You may need to restrict access to beds or other furniture – jumping up and down is usually not good for an injured limb.

Severe lameness, inability to use a limb or seeing it dangling or at a strange angle, signifies an emergency. If you don't think your pet could have hurt itself badly enough to have broken something, it's OK to wait an hour or so before calling us, to see if the pet quickly gets better. If something could be broken, more damage will be done if the limb is not stabilized.