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# Woman's Day®

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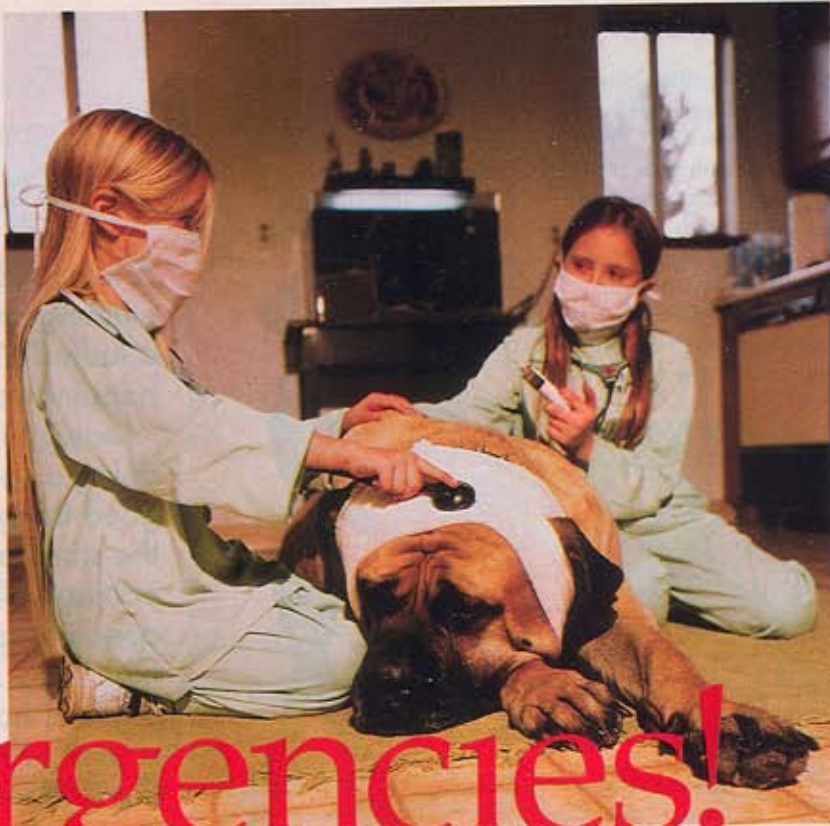
FEBRUARY 19, 2002  
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If your cat or dog needed urgent first aid, would you know what to do?

BY MARGARET LITTMAN

# Pet Emergencies!



While I was cleaning up from dinner one recent Thanksgiving, I noticed that the grease-and-gravy-soaked string I had used to tie the turkey's legs together was missing. I panicked, figuring that one of my usually well-behaved dogs must have eaten it, which can be dangerous because the string can get wrapped around the dog's internal plumbing.

As I dialed my vet's emergency service, I contemplated the potential cost of an after-hours holiday visit. But the technician said that if I could get either Boris or Natasha (whoever gorged on the garbage) to vomit the string, I could avert disaster. Fifteen minutes and a quarter-cup of hydrogen peroxide per 65-pound

mutt later, the string appeared.

My personal episode of "Vet ER" definitely made me lose my appetite for Thanksgiving leftovers, but it did help me save my pups—and save on vet bills, too.

There's no substitute for a veterinarian's professional care, but experts say it pays to know pet first aid. "The same inner voice that you cultivated over the years with your children can also be useful for the four-legged members of your family," says Marty Becker, D.V.M., a Bonners Ferry, Idaho, veterinarian and coauthor of *Chicken Soup for the Pet Lover's Soul*.

Unlike your child, however, your pet can't tell you how he is feeling. But you can learn the difference between canine catastrophe and feline fix-it-yourself.

## Emergency Care

Your veterinarian may have a 24-hour emergency service, but in the case of a life-threatening accident, you'll need to know what to do to keep your pet alive on the way there. Here's how to handle these critical situations:

**Car accidents** This is the most common reason animals are taken to the vet, says Bernadine D. Cruz, D.V.M., a veterinarian in Laguna Hills, California. Like falls (common for cats living in high-rises), car accidents usually cause broken bones. Bandage the wounded limb so your pet won't exacerbate the injury on the way to the vet. When applying the bandage, leave two fingers of space between the bandage and fur so that it won't cut off

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 40

## COMMON HOUSEHOLD PET POISONS

It's nearly impossible to rid your home of all plants and products that could be poisonous to pets. But by knowing what's toxic, you can prevent danger by keeping these items out of reach. If your pet seems weak or tired, has dilated pupils or is disoriented after possible contact with any of these toxins, take her to the vet immediately:

Acetaminophen (Tylenol)  
Antifreeze (appealing because it smells sweet)  
Aspirin (OK for dogs, but deadly to cats)

Azaleas  
Caffeine  
Chocolate (cocoa is stronger, thus more toxic, than milk chocolate)  
Fabric softener sheets

Household cleaning products  
Insecticides  
Mistletoe  
Mothballs  
Poinsettia

## PET EMERGENCIES

CONTINUED

circulation, advises Janet Jones, a licensed veterinary technician at the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine in Knoxville.

You may think you have the most docile pet around, but "when animals are in pain, they tend to bite,"

finger and thumb behind the large upper canine teeth, resting on the gums. Once the pet's jaw is open, you can grab the foreign object with your other hand or tweezers.

**Bleeding Wounds**—after a fight with an alley cat, for instance—

### PET MEDICINE CHEST

Some products made for humans are perfectly safe for animals. Stocking your house with the right items can save you time in an emergency. They can also save you money, since they're often cheaper than fancy pet-specific goods. Make sure you have the following:

**Anti-itch cream**, such as Benadryl, is ideal for allergic reactions and bee stings.

**Aspirin** can be an effective pain reliever for dogs but is fatal to cats.

**Baking soda** is great for making a soothing paste to treat insect bites and rashes.

**Eyewash** (a sterile saline solution) can rinse out debris or chlorinated water after a swim.

**Hydrogen peroxide** can be used to induce vomiting (contact your vet for the correct dosage) and for cleaning cuts, infected ears and larger wounds.

**Pepto-Bismol**, **Kaopectate** or other soothers can help an upset stomach. Your vet's office can give you exact amounts for your animal.

**Triple antibiotic ointments** help prevent infections from cuts and abrasions.

**Tweezers, latex gloves and an assortment of gauze pads** are good to have on hand. Don't forget to replenish your stock after they're used.

says Dr. Becker. In extreme emergencies, they may not even recognize you. A muzzle, either store-bought or a makeshift one from a bathrobe belt, will prevent biting and a trip to the human ER for you.

**Choking** Whether it's chewing on a bone or slurping down a toy left on the floor, pets are at risk of choking. To open the animal's mouth without being bitten, Dr. Becker says you should brace your middle

can run the gamut from simple to serious. Clean the wound with warm water to help remove dirt and debris. Use tweezers to grab larger objects, then bandage the wound with a non-stick gauze pad. Apply firm, continuous pressure and, if the wound bleeds through the gauze, add more until you get to the vet. Don't tear off the old bandage, since it may stop any clotting that has already started. Wrap your pet in a towel or blanket to keep him from gnawing or chewing at the wound while you move him.

**Electrocution** It's not just puppies who chew through electrical cords, says Baltimore-area veterinarian Bobbie Mammato, D.V.M., M.P.H., who has treated many cats who were shocked. First, turn off the power supply. Once it's off, wrap your pet in a blanket to keep him warm and call the vet immediately.

To prevent electrocutions, keep cords away from pet areas or use a safety extension cord (see "Want to know more?"), which automatically shuts off if it is bent or chewed.

### DO'S AND DON'TS OF PET FIRST AID

**DO** pay attention to how much your pet is eating and drinking. Changes in diet can signal sickness and your vet is sure to ask for specifics.

**DON'T** call 911 in an emergency. They're only trained to help humans. Ask your vet for a 24-hour emergency number.

**DON'T** keep human and pet medications together.

**DO** ask your exterminator and landscaper to use pet-safe products in your house and yard.

**DON'T** leave your pet in a parked car. On a hot day, even five minutes can be enough to cause heatstroke.

### Routine First Aid

Adhesive bandages and pet fur may not mix, but that doesn't mean you have to rush to the vet for minor problems. Here's how to take care of them:

**Cuts and scrapes** Pets often get small cuts and bruises, and most can be treated at home. First, trim the surrounding hair, then clean the area and apply antibacterial ointment. Whether or not you bandage it depends on the severity of the wound and your pet. If your pup is likely to lick the area, a bandage will help keep the cut clean. If you do bandage, check it every day to make sure the gauze hasn't become discolored, which is a sign of infection.

**Insect bites** "Fleas and ticks see your pet as lunch," says Dr. Becker. Remove any bug remainders—the tick itself or the stinger from a bee—with a pair of tweezers, or scrape it off with a credit card. Then apply a paste of baking soda and water to ease itching. To prevent infection, follow with an antibacterial soap.

**Vomiting and diarrhea** These common ailments often mean your pet ate something she wasn't supposed to, or she has the flu, but they also may be early signs of stomach cancer, Dr. Cruz warns.

At the first sign of vomiting and diarrhea, stop all food and water for a few hours. If your pet is alert, introduce ice cubes, small amounts of water, or even antidehydration products designed for kids, such as Pedialyte. Once your pet can keep liquids down, you can reintroduce bland foods (such as white rice and boiled hamburger) before going back to pet food. Pepto-Bismol and other over-the-counter medicines also work with animals, but you need to check with your vet to get the appropriate dosage. The same goes for hydrogen peroxide. If you need to induce vomiting, ask your vet for the right dosage. Blood in the stool could be a sign of something more severe and requires a trip to the vet. **WD**

### Want to know more?

● For a free pet safety kit, visit the Purina One Web site.

**e-help:** [www.purinaone.com](http://www.purinaone.com)

● Prepackaged pet first-aid kits are available from First Aid Only, Inc., at 800-886-6659.

**e-help:** [www.firstaidonly.com](http://www.firstaidonly.com)

● To order an indoor safety extension cord (\$9.95 plus shipping), call Technology Research Corporation at 800-501-7444.

**e-help:** [www.fireshield.com](http://www.fireshield.com)