

Ask A Vet: First Aid Care Could Save Your Pet's Life

Sunday, August 16, 2015

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

A few weeks ago my dog was hit by a car near my home and I was clueless in first aid procedure. What are some basic tips for dealing with this unfortunate situation?

Dear Reader,

Dealing with trauma involving your pet can be terrifying, but one must be able to stay calm and have a plan in place. Knowing a few basic principles in first aid is therefore very helpful so it becomes second nature. First of all, know in advance what emergency veterinary care is available and have the contact information ready. Having to thumb through the yellow pages is not what you want to do in this situation. In most cases, trauma first aid can be grouped into three categories; bleeding, fractured bones, and wound care. Injuries beyond this will be diagnosed and dealt with as soon as veterinary care is available.

Bleeding

Most of us that have pets will at some point have to deal with some form of external bleeding. If this bleeding is major or goes on long enough, it can lead to shock and eventually death. As little as two teaspoons of blood loss per pound of body weight can be serious. Applying direct firm pressure is the most important thing to remember. This can be done with absorptive material such as a feminine product or gauze. If blood soaks through simply add more material rather than removing what is saturated. You may use a wrap over this to free your hands if necessary. Use your bare hand if nothing else is available. The use of a tourniquet is discouraged but can be used in extreme situations. Tourniquets must be at least two inches wide and released at least every twenty minutes. Signs of shock can be pale gums, rapid heart rate, or shallow rapid breathing. If these symptoms are noticed there may also be internal bleeding in the abdomen or chest. Your pet will need veterinary help very quickly if this is the case.

Open Wounds:

If the wound is bleeding apply direct pressure. Once the bleeding has stopped cover it with a clean, saline or water soaked bandage material. Feminine products absorb bleeding in their internal portion. Even clean paper towels will do if nothing else is available. It is best to not worry about further cleaning large wounds or applying additional antibiotics or antiseptics and let your veterinarian take it from there. With clean moist bandage material the wound will stay fresh for a few hours. Keep in mind even a docile pet can become dangerous when a wound is being addressed. You may need to use a muzzle or wrap a thick towel around your pet's neck to keep from being bitten.

Fractured or Dislocated Bones:

If the fracture is open or such that the bone is exposed or protruding from the skin, treat it like an open wound and immediately cover it with a moist clean bandage. If possible - carry the animal on a flat board so it does not further damage the fracture site. Do not attempt to set the bone or push it back into place as this may further damage the bone or cause more contamination to an open fracture. An x-Ray by your veterinarian is the only way to accurately diagnose and treat any fracture.

Always remember to stay safe while attempting first aid care. You will not be able to help your pet if you are injured yourself.

-Dr. Justin Sellon