Knowing what to do in case of an emergency or accident involving your pet is a crucial part of responsible pet ownership, and could save your dog or cat’s life. Emergency situations involving pets include road traffic accidents, dog fights, cuts and other injuries and severe medical problems such as acute vomiting. Being aware of the best thing to do in each situation can be invaluable and help you make the right decisions for your pet at a time of high stress.

Before we look at some specific situations and how to deal with them, it’s always worth being prepared for the worst, so here are my 7 first aid essentials:

7 First aid essentials

1. Know your vet’s emergency number so you can call for advice any time of day or night – best to keep it in your mobile phone.

2. Find out where you will need to take your pet in an emergency out of normal working hours – many vets are covered by different practices at night and you need to know how to get there in an emergency.

3. Keep a basic first aid kit at home and in the car, with bandages and antiseptic cream.

4. Always have a supply of fresh water available when you’re out and about, especially in hot weather when it can be a life-saver for an over-heating dog.

5. Keep a thick blanket in the car to wrap up your pet if they are injured. This will help keep them warm and, if he’s a large dog, help you carry him to and from the car easily and without doing further damage to any injuries.

6. Research any problems that particularly affect your breed of dog – for example big dogs like Wolfhounds and Great Danes are prone to bloat and twisted stomachs and it’s important you know what to look for.

7. Take out good pet insurance so that money never becomes an obstacle to treatment.

Road traffic accidents:

Cars are one of the biggest killers of dogs and cats, and the best thing to do is, of course, to stop your pet from being at risk. Make sure dogs are always on the lead whenever you’re near a busy road, no matter how well behaved you think they are, and check the security of your garden to make sure they can never escape and end up wandering onto a road. Cats present more of a problem as they love to roam and explore, but you can reduce their risks by helping motorists see them at night with a LED light on their collar.

If the worst does happen though, there are a few important things to remember which could help save your pet’s life.

1. Make sure they are safe from further injury. If they’re lying in the road, carry them gently to the verge and make them as comfortable as possible there.
2. Identify and stop any obvious bleeding by applying direct pressure through a rolled up t-shirt or other item of clothing.

3. Call your vets and arrange to take them to the surgery straight away for assessment and treatment.

Cuts pads:

One of the most common emergency situations faced by dog owners in particular is the cut pad or paw. A sharp piece of glass or metal in the undergrowth can easily cause a deep and nasty cut, and when dog’s paws are cut, they tend to bleed an awful lot!

In a situation like this you have got two main priorities. Firstly you need to try and stop the bleeding as much as you can and secondly you need to get straight down to your vets a.s.a.p.

To try and get the bleeding under control, take off both of your socks. Pull one over the bleeding paw, and then use the other to tie the first sock securely in place. If possible, pass the second sock around the area where the cut is so that it applies firm direct pressure to the wound. Then give your vets a ring to let them know you are on your way, and get straight down there without delay.

Dog fights:

You’re walking you dog on the lead in the park, minding your own business, when all of a sudden, in a flash of black and tan, another dog races up and launches its teeth into your dog’s neck. You panic, and try desperately to pull the attacker off but to no avail.

Situations like this are not uncommon and can be very distressing for dog and owner alike. But what can you do to help? Well here are a few important do’s and don’ts for breaking up a dog fight:

• Screaming and shouting won’t help!

• Never get anywhere near the biting end of either dog – in the heat of battle even your own dog might inadvertently bite you.

• The best technique is to grab the dogs by their back legs, lift them up like a wheelbarrow, and pull them apart.

• If you are on your own, loop a lead around the back legs of one dog and tie it to a solid object like a tree or fence. Then move around to the second dog, and pull him away by the back legs.

• Make sure you secure both dogs before letting go of the legs – otherwise they’ll be straight back at each other.

Bloat and twisted stomachs:

One of the most serious and quickly life-threatening canine emergencies is bloat caused by a twisted stomach. This is mainly a problem of big dogs like German Shepherds and Great Danes, and it tends to occur after they’ve eaten a large meal and then had some vigorous exercise. What happens is the
stomach twists around and then becomes massively bloated with gas. If not treated very quickly, this can lead to fatal complications, so it’s really important to recognise the signs and get veterinary help as soon as possible if you suspect this condition. The main things to look out for are:

- Hard, bloated stomach
- Vomiting and retching up white froth
- Pain and discomfort

If you suspect your dog is showing these symptoms, it is an absolute emergency and time is of the essence. You need to get your dog to the vets as soon as possible where they will be able to treat the condition with intravenous fluids and an operation to reduce the bloat and untwist the stomach.

As with most things, prevention is far better than treatment, and my best tips for preventing this problem are to feed at least twice a day rather than in one big meal, and to avoid any exercise within 2 hours of a meal.

**Bees, wasps and snakes:**

In the summer lots of pets end up with bee stings, especially around the mouth after they chase and try to swallow a bee. The resulting sting can be very painful and cause a big swelling of the lips and face.

If you know that a bee was to blame (either you saw the bee, or you can spot the sting embedded in the mouth) then head to the kitchen and find some bicarbonate of soda. Rub a small amount over the swollen area, and this will reduce the acidity of the sting and help to bring down the swelling.

If you suspect a wasp, you need to use vinegar as wasp’s stings are alkaline, unlike bees which have an acidic sting. You can tell that a sting was caused by a wasp and not a bee because wasps don’t leave their sting behind.

Snake bites are uncommon in pets, but do occur. In the UK, the adder is the only poisonous snake, and their bites generally occur around the face of dogs who have been rooting around in undergrowth and disturbed an adder. Symptoms of a bite usually include a rapid and painful swelling localised around two small puncture marks, and more serious complications are very uncommon. The best course of action is to keep the dog as quiet as possible and take him to your vets as quickly as possible, where a strong anti-inflammatory injection will usually sort out the problem.

In countries where more venomous snakes exist, it is important to immobilise the bite site to prevent the toxin spreading, especially if it is on a limb, and get veterinary assistance as soon as possible.

**Frequently Asked Questions:**

Q. Is it safe to move pets that have been hit by cars and are lying on the road?

A. In general the priority has to be to get the pet to safety away from the road and to the vet for treatment as quickly as possible so it is better in nearly all circumstances to move the pet rather than leave them.
Q. Can dogs have blood transfusions?

A. Yes – unlike people it is less critical to match blood types in dogs so it is relatively safe to administer a single transfusion to any dog. Many practices will have local donor dogs on standby for emergency situations, and there is also now a national canine blood bank that can supply units of fresh blood and plasma for use in critically ill or injured patients.

Q. What are the most common signs that a cat has been hit by a car?

A. The most common injuries suffered by cats when they are hit by cars are fractures to the pelvis, which will lead to obvious problems walking, pain at the back end and sometimes difficulty urinating, internal injuries to the chest causing breathing difficulties, and head injuries which are the most common cause of fatalities.