

CAT 10

Basic first aid



BLUE FOR
PETS
CROSS

The charity dedicated to helping sick, injured and homeless pets since 1897.



Basic first aid

Make sure you're always prepared for an emergency. The best action for all emergency situations is to contact the vet, so find out the name of your local practice and keep your vet's phone number to hand.

Always phone first, whatever the situation, as there may not be a vet constantly at the clinic. However, staff may be able to suggest immediate action to take. Have a pen handy in case another number is given. Treatment can usually be provided more quickly if the cat is taken to the surgery, rather than calling the vet to your home.

First ensure the safety of yourself and others. Keep calm and assess the situation before acting. Injured animals are frightened and in pain, and may try to bite anyone who touches them. Approach your cat quietly and slowly, avoiding sudden movements. The best way of lifting an injured cat is to put one hand under the chin on the front of the chest, and the other behind the hindlegs.

If the cat seems frightened and potentially aggressive, it is better to lift the cat in a thick towel, but be careful as cats can bite through towels. If you are dealing with an unknown cat, you may be able to encourage the animal into a shed or garage before seeking help. Sometimes cats can be persuaded to run into the safety and security of a cat box,

if there is no other obvious escape route. If you are bitten, see your doctor.

- Never give human medicines to a cat, and do not offer food or drink in case your pet has to have an urgent anaesthetic
- Any cat with breathing difficulties should be handled carefully and gently, particularly if they are breathing with an open mouth. Many of these patients are dangerously ill and can collapse suddenly if upset
- If you have to put an Elizabethan collar on your cat, do not let the cat outside afterwards, as it may prevent your cat seeing traffic
- Drive carefully when going to the surgery and always have the cat in a closed box or carrier for transport.



Is it an emergency?

Sometimes outside normal hours it is difficult to decide whether urgent attention is needed. You can always call to ask for advice.

You should phone the vet if:

- your pet seems weak, is reluctant to get up, or is dull or depressed
- there is difficulty breathing, the breath is noisy or rapid, or there is continual coughing that is causing distress
- there is repeated vomiting, particularly if the animal is young or elderly. Diarrhoea, however, is less serious (except in kittens) unless it is severe, bloody or the animal seems weak or unwell. Feed small amounts of a bland diet (boiled chicken or white fish) and see a vet if it persists more than a day.
- your cat appears to be in severe pain or discomfort
- your pet suddenly has difficulty with balance
- your pet is trying to urinate or defecate but is unable to pass anything. Blockage of the bladder sometimes occurs, especially in males, and can kill if not treated urgently.

For further information, see the pet care leaflet, *Caring for your sick cat* (C11).

Road accidents

Prevention is better than cure so keep your cat in at night, as this is when most road accidents occur. If you find a cat involved in a road accident, take them to the vet, even if the cat appears to be unhurt. There may be internal injuries that are not immediately obvious. Pick up the cat carefully as described above, keeping them warm, and place them in a box for transportation to the surgery.

Falls

Falls can cause severe injuries. If you live in a flat, open windows should be covered with screens. Do not let your cat out onto an unprotected balcony. If your cat falls from a height, take the animal to the vet for a check-up.

Bleeding

Keep the cat quiet and calm. Put on a tight bandage. Improvise with strips of towel or clothing if necessary. If blood is seeping through, apply another tight layer. Only use a tourniquet as a last resort. If you cannot put on a bandage, press a pad firmly onto the wound and hold it in place. Go to the vet straight away.

If you have bandaging materials, layer these as follows. Firstly, place a non-stick dressing on the wound and cover with swabs or a cotton bandage. Then place a layer of cotton wool over this

and cover again with cotton bandage. Secure this top layer of bandage to the hair with surgical tape, and cover all of it with adhesive bandage or tape. Do not stick Elastoplast to the hair and never leave a bandage on for more than 24 hours.



Tail injuries

See your vet if your cat's tail is limp, has been trapped in a door, or pulled hard. Such injuries can cause serious bladder problems.



Broken bones

Deal with any serious bleeding but do not apply a splint – it is painful, and can cause the bone to break through the skin. Confine the patient to a well padded carrier for transportation to the vet.

Burns and scalds

Run cold water over these for at least five minutes then contact your vet. Do not apply ointments or creams, although you can cover the wound with a saline-soaked gauze pad while awaiting treatment. Remember to keep the patient warm.

Poisoning

Try to find packaging from the substance swallowed and have it with you when you phone the vet. If chewing of plants is suspected, try to find out the name of the plant, and cut a sample. Call the vet immediately and do not make your cat vomit unless the vet says to do so. Take any packaging or plant cuttings with you to the vet.



Coat contamination

If a substance such as paint or tar has got onto your cat's coat or paws, prevent your cat licking it, as the substance may be toxic. Use an Elizabethan collar (obtainable from vets) if you have one. You may be able to clip off the small areas of affected hair, but never use turpentine or paint remover on your cat. Contact the vet, as bathing may be necessary. Sedatives may be required to do this thoroughly.

Fits

If your cat is having a fit, do not try to hold or comfort the animal, as this provides stimulation, which may prolong the fit. Darken the room and reduce noise. Remove items which may cause injury, especially anything electrical. Pad your furniture with cushions and call the vet.

Fights

If your cat is wounded after a fight, but seems otherwise well, make a routine appointment with the vet as antibiotics are usually needed. Fight-wounds are often not detected immediately. The first indication may be an oozing smelly wound from a burst abscess. In this case contact your vet.

Eye injuries

Do not allow rubbing of a sore eye with the paws – use an Elizabethan collar. Contact the vet immediately if there has been trauma, if your cat has a closed or discharging eye, or for any sudden eye problem. If chemicals have entered the cat's eye, flush out with water repeatedly (preferably from an eye bottle) and call the vet.

Drowning

Never put yourself at risk attempting to rescue a drowning cat. Wipe away material from the mouth and nose and hold the cat upside down by the hindlegs until any water has drained out. Give resuscitation if breathing has stopped. Even if your pet seems to recover, always see the vet, as complications afterwards are common.

Electric shock

If a high voltage, non-domestic (for example, power lines) supply is involved, **do not approach**. Call the police.

In the home, turn off power first. If this is impossible, you may be able to use a dry non-metallic item, like a broom handle, to push a cat away from the power source. If breathing has stopped, give resuscitation. Call the vet immediately.

Heatstroke

Heatstroke is rare but can happen if a cat has been trapped somewhere such as a greenhouse on a hot day. Affected animals are weak, panting, dribbling and distressed. Put the cat somewhere cool, preferably in a draught. Wet their coat with tepid water (not cold water as this contracts the blood vessels in the skin and slows heat loss) and phone the vet. You may offer the cat a small amount of water.

Stings

Pull out the sting by pressing below the poison sac, then bathe the area in water or either a solution of bicarbonate of soda for a bee sting or diluted vinegar for that of a wasp. Soothe with ice. If the sting is in the mouth or throat, contact the vet as it may swell and interfere with breathing.

Basic resuscitation

Put the animal on their side and check that breathing has definitely stopped (hold a wisp of fur to the nostrils). Open the mouth, pull the tongue forwards and check for obstructions, such as blood.

Be careful not to get bitten when removing any material.

If breathing does not start, extend the head (pointing the nose forwards). Hold the mouth closed, and blow into the nose about ten times per minute. If you cannot feel a heartbeat, push on the chest just behind the forelegs every one or two seconds. Give two breaths into the nose for every 15 pushes on the chest. If this is unsuccessful after three minutes, recovery is unlikely.

Items for your cat's first aid kit.

- Bandages – a roll of self-adhesive or crepe bandage (five centimetres width)
- Conforming or open-weave bandages (two and a half centimetres width)
- Surgical sticky tape
- Box of cotton wool
- Box of sterile absorbent gauze or a packet of swabs
- Some non-adhesive absorbent dressings (five centimetres square) to cover open wounds
- Blunt-ended scissors, preferably curved
- Thick towel
- Elizabethan collar (pictured)
- Bottle of sterile saline solution

Happy, healthy pets

Blue Cross advice leaflets are packed full of top tips to help owners with their pet questions. They cover a wide range of topics, from training a puppy to caring for an older cat. So if you need some support to help you with a pet problem, whether it's about a dog or a degu, we're here for you.

You can read and download our leaflets online at www.bluecross.org.uk

Visit our website to take advantage of all its features, including:

- blog posts from Blue Cross experts
- latest news
- events near you
- pets needing new homes

Or you can join in the chat on our online communities. Find us on Twitter and Facebook – just search for Blue Cross.



Blue Cross

Blue Cross has been dedicated to the health and happiness of pets since 1897. Abandoned or unwanted, ill or injured – we do what's needed to give every pet a healthy life in a happy home. We're a charity, so the more help you give us, the more help we can give pets.

How you can help

Blue Cross doesn't receive any government funding, so we rely on the generosity of pet lovers like you. There are lots of ways you can help the sick, injured and abandoned pets in our care, like making a donation, fundraising for us or leaving us a legacy.

Please call us on 0300 777 1897 or visit www.bluecross.org.uk



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