

Pet First Aid 101

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Justine has more than 18 years of experience in the veterinary industry and is a board-certified emergency critical care veterinary specialist and toxicologist as well as the CEO and founder of Vetgirl. She is also a founding member of IDEXX's Pet Health Network team.

[Dr. Justine Lee](#) gives you the basics on pet first aid. For more from Dr. Lee, find her on [Facebook](#)!

Did you know that this month is **National Pet First Aid Awareness Month**? When it comes to caring for your dog or cat, prevention is the best medicine.

So, how do we prevent accidents and emergencies from happening in the first place? Simple steps of prevention like:

- Keeping your dog on a leash or under strict verbal control (to prevent being hit by a car, etc.)
- Keeping your cat indoors (to prevent being attacked by the neighborhood dog, etc.)
- Pet-proofing your house to make sure accidental poisoning doesn't occur
- Appropriately crate training of your dog
- Making sure your pets are appropriately collared (at all times) and microchipped

Most importantly, monitor your dog or cat carefully for signs of illness. Prevent an emergency situation before it occurs: be aware of any changes in your pet's health or behavior. If your pet exhibits any of the following signs, seek veterinary attention immediately! As we discussed in a [previous blog](#), the sooner your veterinarian can diagnose the problem, the better your pet's prognosis is (and the less expensive it is!).

- Lack of appetite
- Weight loss
- Collapse
- Persistent coughing
- Dilated pupils
- Lethargy/weakness

- Blue or pale gums
- Restlessness and panting
- Unproductive retching
- Difficulty breathing
- Abnormal heart rate
- Pain
- Increased thirst
- Increased urination

Stop. Assess. Act.

If your dog or cat does require first aid, the first thing to do is to stop and remain calm. It's important that you keep calm so you can properly assess the situation and communicate clearly with your veterinarian, emergency veterinarian, or [an animal poison control center](#).

1. Put safety first. Before rushing in to aid an injured pet, take a moment to ensure that it's safe for you to enter the area.
2. Check the ABCDs: Airway, Breathing, Circulation, Disability. Clear your pet's airway, check for breathing and pulse and assess his level of injury.
3. Administer first aid. Control bleeding, flush burns, immobilize broken limbs, etc.
4. Get to a veterinary hospital ASAP. Program into your cell phone the numbers of your veterinarian, an emergency veterinarian and [an animal poison control center](#). Call the veterinary hospital to alert them that you are on the way, so they can be prepared.

Next week, we'll take about basic vitals that you should know for your dog – so you know what an elevated heart rate is and when it's abnormal. Stay tuned so you're prepared!

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian – they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.