The Complete Cat First Aid Manual

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Introduction

Hello and Welcome to the Complete Cat First Aid Manual.

Thank you for purchasing our book. You have taken that first very important step in being able to provide the correct health and emergency first aid care for your cat.

We have been practising veterinarians for many years, and in that time we have seen thousands of emergencies. In some cases, the owner arrived at the clinic just a little too late; there was nothing we could do to save their beloved cat. We once had a beautiful young cat come to our clinic named Gizmo, who died from kidney failure. By the time the owners arrived at the clinic, he was in shock and he had such severe renal damage we could do nothing to save him. If Gizmo’s owners had been aware of some of the specific First Aid techniques, disease signs and symptoms in this book, he may have been alive today. In many cases correct and massive veterinary treatment can help these animals survive. But owners also need to be aware of what to do in the absolutely critical first few minutes of a feline medical emergency and to be able to quickly assess the potential seriousness of the situation. Our book will tell you how to do this easily and simply.

This guide will not tell you how to be a vet - the whole idea is to educate you in the vital area of Cat First Aid in a simple easy to read format and then provide a manual you can refer back to if faced with an emergency first aid situation

Emergencies happen every day and as a loving cat owner it is vital that you are prepared and knowledgeable. By being an involved pet owner you have taken a huge step in purchasing the Complete Cat First Aid Manual.

Go through the individual chapters on the various conditions. Practice what you learn. Perform CPR on one of your cuddly toys BEFORE there is an emergency situation and you need to. Watch the videos we will be producing and practice, practice, practice!

Now let’s embark on the first step of this exciting and potentially life-saving journey to teach you how to provide effective, safe feline emergency care and first aid for your cat, BEFORE an emergency happens.
A message to the reader

This is one of the most detailed books on cat-only first aid that has been published online. However, it is not a substitute for veterinary care. In an emergency, you need to be able to perform basic first aid, and then transport your cat to the veterinarian. In some cases you may be a long distance from the emergency vet, and you might for example need to know how to stop bleeding from a lacerated artery.

After you have used the specific first aid techniques to stabilize your pet, then we strongly recommend taking your pet to a veterinarian for a full examination to determine their veterinary first aid needs and treatment.

This e-book is organized by the basic facts you need to know and then specific first aid problems.

We have tried to ensure that all the doses are accurate, and clearly warn against using certain medications.

We know you will find the information in this book helpful for a variety of your cat’s first aid needs.

We want to empower you, the pet owner, to know exactly what to do in an emergency situation: it really can be the difference between life and death.

You can search for any topic using the search box in the Adobe Reader top navigation bar and also we have put a link back to the Table Of Contents or Index at the top of every page. This allows you to quickly get to the specific information you need.

Feel free to send us an email regarding material pertaining to this book, at catfirstaid@cat-first-aid.com.

Sincerely,

Sarah Middleton MRCVS 
Paul Proctor MRCVS.
About the authors:

SARAH MIDDLETON MRCVS cert GP (FelP):

I graduated from The University of Liverpool not wanting to deal with anything smaller than a Shetland pony! After a very intensive year in mixed practice in rural Richmond I decided to hang up the wellies, keep the large animals as a hobby and focus on small animals.

I then spent three and a half years working on the North East coast in a small animal practice where I worked mainly at the branch surgery. This enabled me to gain valuable experience of building relationships with clients and coping as the sole vet - sometimes a little scary - one instance being the Chihuahua presented with her eye hanging from the socket. I’m happy to say that all went well and everything was restored to its rightful place!

I particularly like cats and have completed my General Practitioner Certificate in Feline Practice in July 2008 having successfully passed the written exam and case report. Achieving this qualification allowed me to gain important insights into feline medicine and behaviour.

Together with my partner Paul, we have two rescue cats - Merlin who I obtained as a stray in Richmond in 2003 and Marmalade who joined us in August 2007. I have a horse called Victor who I try to ride as often as I can - not easy when trying to run a practice. Chloe, our dog is an elderly Lhasa Apso who we obtained in February 2007 as she was going to be put to sleep.

For more detailed information about Sarah and the practice, visit www.simplycats.net
PAUL PROCTOR MRCVS:

I was born and brought up in Morpeth, Northumberland, where my parents still live. After doing A levels at King Edwards in Morpeth I went to Liverpool vet school and spent five years there learning all about animals, beer and Liverpool (hopefully in that order).

I have always been interested in cats and horses and in fact actually joined the Feline Advisory Bureau in 1983, an early member.

I then entered mixed practice in Malton, North Yorkshire and Hexham, Northumberland where I spent 4 and 3 years respectively. The work load was approximately 60% small and 40% large, including doing all the Zoo work at Flamingo land as it was then in North Yorkshire. This was definitely different, from rasping zebra’s teeth, sedating tigers for export to Romania and chasing an escaped orang-utan, “it shouldn’t happen to a vet” as Mr Herriot would have said.

I then spent the next three years in mainly small animal practice including work in a specialist small animal hospital in Newcastle upon Tyne. However due to the senior partner of a small mixed practice having a severe car crash I was asked to run a country practice in Corbridge and one thing led to another and I started up a 1.5 man practice with another vet which grew to a primarily equine seven vets based unit in Northumberland.

However, after nearly 17 years here I was offered the chance to follow the second of my passions - cats, and to be involved with Sarah in setting up a cat only practice in Fencehouses, on the borders of County Durham and Tyne and Wear. Sarah and I always felt cats had a rough deal at traditional vets as most practices are canine orientated rather than feline friendly. Cats are so different that we felt they really deserved their own cat-specific vet practice, providing a high standard of feline care in a cat friendly stress free environment. We started to imagine what it would be like with no barking dogs, no smells and every member of staff being a cat lover.

A wonderful example of this dream was reinforced when we toured the new small animal hospital in Liverpool during Feb 2009. We saw the cat unit, with a resident Siamese cat on his back and looking as relaxed as only a cat can in his hospital cage.
All was peaceful and quiet, with no smells at all in the feline unit. However we then walked 20 yards down the corridor into the canine kennels and hospitalisation area and our senses were overwhelmed by barking dogs and the strong odour of dog faeces and urine, despite the standards of care and cleaning being very high. Cats and dogs inhabit two different worlds and we hope to have created a stress free utopian cat environment at our new clinic for both cats and clients.

Marmalade relaxes on his cat sized computer and surf board...

The next few years, after leaving my partnership, were spent attending feline vet conferences all over the world including Prague and Edinburgh to ensure I was up to date with all aspects of feline medicine and surgery. Sarah also obtained her certificate in feline general practice after two years of study, an exam and final dissertation. A property was finally found that gave us all we needed for the practice with good road access and adjacent parking. Building work started at the beginning of February 2009 and we finally opened on 5th May 2009.

For more details please visit the website at www.simplycats.net
Table Of Contents

Introduction .............................................................................................................Page 2
Message to the reader. ............................................................................................Page 3
About the authors ..................................................................................................Page 4 - 6
Table of contents ..................................................................................................Page 7 -8
The essentials of first aid for your cat ..................................................................Page 9
First aid - the basics. .................................................................................................Page 9
Restraint ..................................................................................................................Page 10
Respiration ..............................................................................................................Page 10
Heart rate and Pulse. ...............................................................................................Page 11
Mucous membrane and capillary refill time ........................................................Page 12
Order of importance (triage) ................................................................................Page 13
Shock ........................................................................................................................Page 14 - 15
Artificial respiration and heart massage ...............................................................Page 16
Artificial respiration ...............................................................................................Page 17
Wounds. ....................................................................................................................Page 18 - 20
Bandaging ...............................................................................................................Page 21 - 22
Transporting an injured cat ....................................................................................Page 23 - 24
How to decide when your cat needs veterinary attention ....................................Page 25
Behaviour .................................................................................................................Page 26
Breathing ................................................................................................................Page 27
Mobility and appearance ........................................................................................Page 28
Dehydration .............................................................................................................Page 29
Eye conditions. .......................................................................................................Page 30
Ear conditions .........................................................................................................Page 31
Examination of head and neck ..............................................................................Page 32
Examination of chest, abdomen and legs ..............................................................Page 32
Examination of tail, anus and genitals ..................................................................Page 33
Skin and fur and alimentary system. .....................................................................Page 34
Bladder and coping in an emergency. ....................................................................Page 35 - 36
Problems with kittening ......................................................................................Page 35 - 36
Burns .......................................................................................................................Page 37
Constipation ..........................................................................................................Page 38
Convulsions and seizures ......................................................................................Page 39
Coughing ...............................................................................................................Page 40
Diabetic emergencies ............................................................................................Page 41
Diarrhoea ................................................................................................................Page 42
Drowning ...............................................................................................................Page 43
Electric shock .........................................................................................................Page 44
Ear injuries.................................................................Page 45
Eye injuries.................................................................Page 46
Fainting.........................................................................Page 47
Fish hooks......................................................................Page 48
Fractures.........................................................................Page 49
Frostbite and hypothermia................................................Page 50
Heart failure....................................................................Page 51
Heatstroke......................................................................Page 52
Injury to skin....................................................................Page 53
Lameness.........................................................................Page 54 – 55
Losing balance.................................................................Page 56
Mouth conditions/nasal problems....................................Page 57
Poisoning – Skin contact................................................Page 58
Poisoning – Inhaled........................................................Page 59
#Swallowed.....................................................................Page 59
Poisoning – Acidic/alkali..................................................Page 60 – 61
Poisoning – Rodent poison..............................................Page 62
Poisoning – Slug and snail bait.......................................Page 63
Poisoning – Antifreeze.....................................................Page 63
Poisoning – Aspirin........................................................Page 64
Poisoning – Illegal drugs................................................Page 64
Poisoning – Sedatives, anti depressants and anti anxiety......Page 65
Poisonous plants............................................................Page 66 – 67
Porcupine quills.............................................................Page 68
Puncture wounds...........................................................Page 69 – 70
Scratching.......................................................................Page 71
Snake bites.....................................................................Page 72
Spider bites.....................................................................Page 73
Swallowed objects........................................................Page 74
Swollen paws....................................................................Page 75
Urinary problems............................................................Page 76
Vomiting.........................................................................Page 77
Observation check list......................................................Page 78
Contents of cat first aid kit..............................................Page 79 – 80
Disclaimer......................................................................Page 81
THE ESSENTIALS OF FIRST AID FOR YOUR CAT

What to do in a cat-astrophe!

A few decades ago, the average life expectancy for a cat was about 10 years. Now, with improved nutrition, vaccination and an improved standard of care for our cats many live from 13 to 20 years. Most people get their cats checked by a vet at least annually for vaccination, and many keep up regular treatment programs against parasites like fleas and worms. The problem can come in deciding when a cat needs veterinary attention for other conditions, and what constitutes an ‘emergency’.

Hopefully this e-book should shed some light onto how to give your cat first aid in an emergency and how to decide if and when your cat needs veterinary attention.

FIRST AID - The Basics

It’s very tempting to rush in to an emergency situation without thinking things through. It’s human nature to try to help other living creatures who are in pain or distress. The most important objectives of first aid however are to PRESERVE LIFE and PREVENT FURTHER INJURY. You need to assess the situation quickly to ensure you are not placing yourself in danger by trying to help and not causing further injury or distress to the cat. In some situations you may be able to administer first aid on the spot; in others (particularly if someone else is available to help) you should telephone a vet and arrange immediate transport to the surgery. It is always better to get the cat to a vet rather than call a vet out as a clinic is properly equipped to deal with emergencies. It also reduces the time the cat has to wait before effective treatment can be administered.

It’s best to learn when your cat is fit and healthy and how to examine and restrain him, rather than wait for an incident to happen. Reward your cat when you do this with either food treats or play, and don’t try to do everything at once!

Restraint

Use minimal restraint to carry out an examination - most cats resent being heavily restrained. An injured or frightened cat is likely to hiss, spit, bite and claw so will need wrapping in a towel or blanket to be
moved. If you are bitten or clawed, seek medical advice, particularly if a finger joint is involved.

Talk soothingly and approach the cat calmly. Avoid direct eye contact as this is a threatening sign to a cat. Check the cat’s expression. If the cat is relaxed, gently stroke around his head then slip your hand under his body to pick him up. If he is frightened or angry place a blanket or towel over the whole of the cat and gently wrap him up. Once his legs are secured inside the blanket, unwrap his head. Speak calmly and move slowly.

If you are practising on your cat and he is frightened, stop what you are doing and use another more amenable cat to practice on.

**Respiration**

A normal cat breathes between 10 and 30 times a minute, kittens have a faster respiratory rate than adult cats. A stressed cat will also have a higher respiratory rate than normal.

When your cat is relaxed, watch him breathe and count the number of times he either breathes in **OR** out in 15 seconds. Multiply by 4 to find the rate per minute. If you have a hairy cat, you may not be able to see the chest movements so holding a piece of tissue paper in front of his nose may help count the breaths (as long as he doesn’t think it’s a game to swipe at!)

Purring can cause problems while trying to count the number of breaths a cat takes. A normal cat’s nostrils do not flare on breathing so if this is happening it implies extra effort is needed to breathe and something is wrong. It is not normal for a cat to breathe through his open mouth so again, if you see this, something is wrong.

**Heart Rate and Pulse**

A normal cat’s resting heart rate varies from 120 to 180 beats per minute. Kittens have higher rates of up to 260 beats per minute. To feel a heart beat, hold your cat under his chest with your right hand with your thumb on the left side of his chest and fingers on the right. Gently hold the chest just behind the elbows and you should be able to feel a heart beat. Count the number in 15 seconds and multiply by 4 to find the heart rate per
minute. The heart rate can increase with excitement, exercise, fear, pain, shock, poisoning or overactive thyroid conditions so determine your cat’s heart rate while he is fit, healthy and relaxed. The femoral pulse can be felt by placing your fingers inside the hind leg where it joins the body. Count for 15 seconds and multiply by 4. It can be difficult to find a pulse even in slim cats and may be impossible in those that are overweight!
Mucous Membrane Color and Capillary Refill Time

The colour of a cat’s gums can give important information.

- A normal cat has pink, moist gums. A cat that is losing blood or is in shock will have pale or white gums.
- A cat with liver problems may have a yellow tinge to his gums (jaundice)
- A cat that isn’t receiving sufficient oxygen will have grey/blue gums
- A cat that has ‘brick red’ gums may have heat stroke or carbon monoxide poisoning.

Look at your cat’s gums when he is healthy and see what shade of pink is normal for him.

Capillary refill time is the time taken for blood to return to the area of gum after it has been pressed for a few seconds.

Normal capillary refill time is 1-2 seconds. If it takes longer than this for the pink colour to return it could indicate impending shock or blood loss from the circulation.
ORDER OF IMPORTANCE (Triage)

The following are emergencies listed in order of priority for action - all must be seen by a veterinary surgeon

1. No pulse, no breathing
2. Pulse but not breathing
3. Unconscious
4. Shock
5. Breathing difficulties
6. Chest puncture
7. Severe bleeding
8. Abdominal puncture
9. Hyperthermia (extreme hot) or hypothermia (extreme cold)
10. Poisoning
**SHOCK**

Pale or white gums, rapid heart rate of greater than 200 beats per minute and fast breathing over 40 beats per minute imply SHOCK and must be dealt with whatever the emergency.

Shock can be caused by bleeding, heart failure, burns, vomiting, diarrhoea, trauma, animal bites, diabetes, poisoning, illness and many other causes. Shock must always be treated before most other injuries including fractures. If left untreated, shock will lead to unconsciousness and death.

**Early Shock** is characterised by rapid breathing, high heart rate, pale or light coloured mucous membranes, restlessness or lethargy, slow capillary refill time and normal (or slightly low) rectal temperature.

**Late Shock** is characterised by shallow slow breathing, irregular heart beat, pale or blue mucous membranes, lack of response, weakness or unconsciousness, capillary refill longer than four seconds and a low body temperature.

To minimise the effects of shock:

- Place the cat on his side with his head extended.
- Raise his hind quarters by placing a pillow or towel under them.
- Stop obvious bleeding by applying pressure or a tourniquet.
- Give artificial respiration or heart massage if indicated.
- Prevent loss of body heat with a towel, bubble wrap or aluminium blanket.
- Get to the nearest vet immediately.
- **Do not give food or water to the cat**
- **Do not let a conscious cat move around**
ANAPHYLACTIC SHOCK can be brought on by drugs, insect bites or stings, or food. It is important to recognise any preceding factors like recent injections or drugs administered, presence of insects and sites of swelling, difficulty breathing, retching, vomiting, diarrhoea or collapse.

Maintain an airway and give artificial respiration and heart massage if required. A gurgling noise may be heard if your cat’s lungs are filling with fluid. If this happens, suspend the cat by its hind limbs for 10 seconds to clear the airway and transport for immediate veterinary attention.

Allergic reactions to bites and injections can cause the face to swell and become itchy. Your vet should be able to give the cat an injection (steroid) to reduce the reaction.
ARTIFICIAL RESPIRATION AND HEART MASSAGE

A lack of oxygen to the brain for several minutes will result in brain damage. The immediate provision of first aid may be life saving in circumstances where either the heart or breathing has stopped. The process of combining heart massage and artificial respiration is known as CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation).

CPR is usually required for humans having heart attacks or strokes, both of which are extremely uncommon in cats. In cats, causes of unconsciousness that may require CPR include choke, electrocution, blood loss, concussion, shock, smoke inhalation and near drowning.

When first dealing with a collapsed cat, you need to determine if the cat is conscious. Look for these signs of consciousness:

• Cat reacts when you clap your hands or whistle loudly.
• Cat blinks (or tries to bite you!) when you pinch hard between his toes.
• Cat pulls back when you pull his limb.
• If the heart is beating but the cat is unconscious and not breathing, you need to give artificial respiration.
• If the heart is not beating and the cat is unconscious and not breathing you need to perform CPR.

Do not perform either procedure unless the cat is unconscious and will die without your help.
**Artificial Respiration**

- Place the cat on his side and pull the tongue forward, clearing away any debris.
- Close the cat’s mouth, pull the upper lips over the lower and place your mouth over the cat’s nose.
- Blow in until you see the chest expand.
- Take your mouth away and let the lungs deflate.
- Repeat every two to three seconds.
- Check the pulse every 10 seconds to ensure the heart is still beating.
- Get veterinary attention immediately.

**Heart Massage**

- Place the cat on his side with the head lower than the body (to try to direct more blood to the brain where it is needed most).
- Hold the cat’s chest between your thumb and fingers just behind the elbows.
- Support the cat’s back with your other hand.
- Squeeze upwards towards the neck, compressing the chest.
- Repeat the pumping action about 100 times a minute. Don’t worry about hurting the cat - this is a matter of life and death.
- Apply heart massage for 15 seconds and artificial respiration for 10 seconds.
- Get veterinary attention immediately.
- If two people are available, one should perform the artificial respiration, the other doing heart massage - stopping while each performs his own duty - two breaths to every 10 seconds heart massage. If a third person is available, they should apply pressure to the cat’s groin to divert as much blood as possible to the brain.
WOUNDS

1. Bruises

Bruises can be caused by trauma to the skin without breaking the skin’s surface. They can be superficial or serious. Blunt force trauma is generally the cause of a bruise. It is important to look for other signs of injury and shock if bruises are detected e.g. in the case of road traffic accidents. Bruises cause swelling, pain and skin discolouration which may be difficult to see in dark pigmented cats or those with thick or long fur. There may be fractured bone under a bruise so be careful when trying to examine your cat.

Applying a cold compress to the affected area can help reduce swelling. An ice pack or bag of frozen peas wrapped in a cotton towel to avoid skin damage from the cold, can be used for this. If any other injuries are apparent or your cat appears to be going into shock consult a vet immediately, especially in cases of bruising to the abdomen.

2. Cuts

When the skin is broken, the underlying tissue is exposed to dirt and bacteria so there is risk that open wounds can become infected.

If the wound is bleeding, direct pressure with a non stick absorbent material should be applied. If bleeding is severe, apply the pressure and don’t remove the blood soaked absorbing material as this disturbs the clot and causes further bleeding. Instead wrap a further bandage or cloth around the area and seek immediate veterinary attention. Try to keep the area raised above heart level if you are able but only if you are sure there is not a fracture present. If bleeding is not severe, flush the wound with salt water trying to remove any obvious dirt or gravel. A ‘sports cap’ drinks bottle is ideal for flushing wounds once it has been rinsed of its original contents. Do not attempt to pull large objects from a wound like wood or metal as this could cause uncontrolled bleeding, instead seek immediate veterinary attention.

If there is a lot of hair adjacent to the wound either cut it with scissors when it is wet or apply KY jelly to the actual wound after cleaning and clip the hair (if your cat will tolerate this). After clipping, the whole area can be cleaned again; the KY jelly is water soluble so will be easy to clean away.
Wounds continued

Do not use antiseptic solutions to clean wounds - this can damage the sensitive tissue and the aim is really to flush debris from the wound rather than disinfect the area! PHENOL based compounds (such as Dettol or Savlon) are particularly dangerous to cats and can cause poisoning so should never be used on cats.

Most bleeding superficial wounds will stop with applied pressure. If a wound continues to bleed after the application of pressure or if the blood is spurting (likely an artery) pressure should be applied in the form of a bandage and immediate veterinary attention sought. Some areas like the ear tips or claws can bleed quite profusely and are often difficult to apply pressure to so veterinary attention should be sought.

Some cuts will require suturing by a veterinary surgeon so if you are in any doubt about a wound, seek veterinary advice. Some cats will not let you clean or examine a wound - seek veterinary advice if this is the case as your cat may need sedating for a full examination of the wound to be achieved. If a wound becomes hot, red and inflamed or starts to discharge it is likely it is infected and will need antibiotic treatment from your vet.

Do not apply pressure to a wound with obvious underlying fractured bones - GET IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION.
**Wounds continued**

3. **Abscesses**

Cats that fight tend to suffer from abscesses caused by teeth punctures introducing bacteria under the skin. The affected area tends to be painful, swollen and generally discharges pus. Look for clumps of matted hair on your cat, especially if he is prone to fighting and objects to you touching the area. A course of antibiotic is often required so veterinary attention should be sought within 24 hours. Occasionally an abscess will swell but not discharge - in these cases the cat may need sedating and the abscess drained and flushed.
BANDAGING

Fully conscious cats are virtually impossible to bandage!! Cats hate being restrained to bandage and generally if you do manage to get a bandage in place you can bet within 30 seconds your cat will have shaken the bandage off!

Bandages do keep wounds dry and protected from further injury and contamination and absorb seeping fluids. A vet will often put a bandage on a cat if he has been sedated for wound clean up or suturing so if your cat has a dressing it is important to monitor and look after it. Cover the dressing with a plastic bag when your cat uses the litter tray to stop it getting wet and keep your cat indoors until it can be removed. Monitor your cat’s leg for any lameness, swelling above the dressing or unpleasant smell. Call the vet if these occur especially if your cat becomes miserable or goes off his food. Do not let your cat lick and pull at the dressing - you may need to obtain an Elizabethan collar from your vet.
Bandaging continued

Do not try to apply a splint to a conscious cat - the cat will struggle too much and is likely to cause further damage to himself. If a limb is dangling, you can try to immobilise it by placing a small T shirt over the cat’s head and wrapping the whole trunk and affected limb in the T shirt and pulling the unaffected limb through the arm hole.

After any traumatic injury always treat shock first - this takes precedence over any broken bones.

Tourniquets can often do more harm than good as they stop the blood and oxygen supply areas which can cause cell death and a build up of toxic waste products which when released cause major systemic problems. Instead of a tourniquet, use pressure to stop bleeding. For suspected poisonous snake bites, use ice packs and immobilization to prevent the spread of poison round the body rather than a tourniquet.
TRANSPORTING AN INJURED CAT

Care must be taken when lifting and transporting an injured cat not only to prevent further injury and pain for the cat but also to protect yourself as injured cats are much more likely to scratch and bite.

Minor Injuries

If the cat is willing to get into his carry box or container, let him do so. Lift the cat by placing one hand under the neck and the other under the chest with your arm cradling the body. Gently lift and place in a carry box. The floor of the box should be cushioned with a towel or blanket. For this procedure, remove the upper part of the carry box rather than using the ‘door’.
Transporting an injured cat continued

Critical Injuries

Critical injuries are those in which a cat is unable to move for himself e.g. fractures and paralysis. It is important when lifting a cat like this to support the back, keep any broken legs uppermost unless there is a chest injury in which case the damaged lung should be on the side the cat is lying regardless of limb fractures. Keeping the cat’s back toward you, gently slide it onto a small board - a side of a cardboard box is ideal. Try to place the cat in a box for transport and cover it to prevent heat loss.

Get to a vet as soon as possible - if items for support are not readily available, don’t waste time looking for them.

Avoid bending or twisting an injured cat’s body.

If you have wrapped the cat up make sure there is no pressure on his chest and that he can breathe freely.
HOW TO DECIDE IF AND WHEN YOUR CAT NEEDS VETERINARY ATTENTION

It can be difficult deciding whether your cat needs veterinary attention and if so how quickly you need to be seen. Problems that cause severe pain, risk permanent damage or put your cat’s life in danger need IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION.

1. Body Temperature

The normal body temperature for a cat is between 38.1 and 39.2 degrees Celsius (100.5 to 102.5 degrees Fahrenheit).

Temperatures above normal can be due to nervousness, exercise, excess heat and infection. Temperatures below normal can be caused by exposure to cold weather and shock. It is always advisable to try to obtain a normal resting temperature for your individual cat. Some normal cats have temperatures towards the higher end and even beyond the range; if you know your cat is one of these you will be able to determine whether a raised temperature is significant or not.
If your cat is amenable, shake down a glass thermometer, lubricate the tip with KY jelly and insert it about 2cm into the cat’s rectum. Wait 60-90 seconds, remove and read. **Never take a cat’s temperature by mouth and if your cat resents his rectal temperature being taken then stop.** Special thermometers like those which are used for babies using the ear are probably best for most cats at home. Digital thermometers are more robust than glass ones and tend to give a reading within a shorter time frame, however they do require batteries that need replacing from time to time.

- 41°C (106°F and above) - Very high temperature - **Seek immediate veterinary attention.**
- 40.6°C (105°F) - High temperature - **Seek veterinary attention immediately.**
- 39.4°C (103°F) - Probable fever - **Seek veterinary advice the same day.**
- 38.1°C to 39.2°C (100.5°F to 102.5°F) - Normal
- 37.8°C (100°F) - Normal / mild hypothermia - **Seek veterinary advice the same day.**
- 37.2°C (99°F) - Low temperature - **Seek veterinary attention the same day.**
- 36.7°C and below (98°F and below) - Very low temperature - **Seek immediate veterinary attention.**

2. **Behaviour**

Any alteration from your cat’s normal behaviour is a cause for concern, even if the change is a positive one i.e. normally solitary cat seeking company. Unexpected purring can indicate pain or distress so don’t always assume a purring cat is a happy cat.

Your cat is alert if you approach him and he responds to your interaction. If he doesn’t respond you need to note if he is disorientated, drowsy, depressed, bumping into things, unstable or staring. If he is doing any of these things, check the colour of his gums, pulse and breathing rate.
If they are white and rapid, your cat is in **SHOCK** and needs **IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION**.

If you touch your cat and he responds with resentment, vocalisation or tries to hide he could have an injury or be in pain. You should **seek veterinary attention the same day**. If he has white gums, fast breathing and a rapid pulse and / or doesn’t respond to touch he could be in **SHOCK** and needs **IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION**.

If your cat’s body feels hot, cold or tender and he has signs of **SHOCK** seek **IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION**.

Sometimes cats make unusual noises that are nothing to worry about. These include the chattering of teeth when they see birds through a window or the sounds that occur before a hair ball is vomited. Other unusual sounds should be investigated further.

- Laboured breathing - seek **IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION**.
- Sucking chest sounds or gagging - seek **IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION**.
- Exaggerated swallowing - **SEE A VET WITHIN 12 HOURS**.
- Decreased alertness, decreased sleeping, restless - **SEE A VET WITHIN 24 HOURS**.
- Coughing - **SEE A VET SOON IF COUGHING LONGER THAN 24 HOURS**.

### 3. Breathing

- Gasping, laboured, shallow, rapid or VERY slow- seek **IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION**.
- Wheezing - **SEE VET WITHIN 12 HOURS**
- Coughing - **SEE A VET SOON IF COUGHING LONGER THAN 24 HOURS**.
- Intense panting - seek **IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION**.
• Distressed, pawing at mouth, gagging, profuse saliva, choke - LOOK FOR AN OBJECT IN THE MOUTH AND SEEK IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION.

If the cat is unconscious or is choking, hold the cat by its thighs and swing it in a low arc. If this fails to dislodge the object put the cat on its side, support the back with one hand, squeeze the abdomen just behind the ribs with the other hand upwards and forwards towards the throat. This is a variation of the Heimlich maneuver - NB too much pressure can cause internal bleeding. Give artificial respiration or CPR as necessary and get immediate veterinary assistance.

4. Mobility and General Appearance

Look for any visible wounds on your cat or the presence of blood. The presence of broken teeth or scuffed, broken nails can indicate possible road traffic accidents and potential for more serious internal injuries so check for signs of shock - pale gums, high respiratory and pulse rate SEEK IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION.

Check for signs of disorientation - staggering, falling over or collapsed. Is the abdomen swollen? Are there unusual chest movements? SEEK IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION.

The following conditions all necessitate SEEING A VET WITHIN 12 HOURS

• Muscle spasm
• Slow deliberate movement
• Dilated pupils
• Swelling
• Threads or strings from mouth or anus
• Arched back
• Tilted head
• Circling
5. **Odours**

If a cat has a sweet smell to his breath **SEE A VET IMMEDIATELY.**

If you can smell smoke fumes, antifreeze or tar on your cat **SEEK VETERINARY ADVICE**

If you smell anal glands or urine or faeces are present on the coat, check for injuries and treat as necessary.

6. **Dehydration**

The first way to assess levels of dehydration is ‘skin tenting’ - pinch the skin between your cat’s shoulder blades - in normal animals the skin will spring back to position; in dehydrated animals the skin will remain tented. Check that the eyes do not appear ‘sunken’ where the eye balls recede into your cats head as this is an indicator of marked dehydration. When checking your cat’s CRT, the gums should feel moist. If they are dry or tacky, this implies dehydration. Potential causes of dehydration include

- Not drinking/eating
- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Excessive panting
- Loss of body fluids

Marked dehydration requires **immediate veterinary attention** and it is likely that your cat will need to be put on a drip for intravenous fluid administration. This can be very difficult with very ill or very young animals and sometimes fluids are given under the skin in this instance. In mild cases of dehydration ie after a bout of vomiting or diarrhoea, fluids can be replaced orally at home. The normal fluid requirement of a cat is 50-60ml/kg/day so a 5kg cat requires 250-300ml of fluid over 24hours ie about 10-15ml per hour. You can encourage cats to drink by running a tap, adding ice cubes (especially those made with tuna juice) to a small amount of water in a plastic bowl or gently syringing water or electrolyte replacer eg Lectade into your cat’s mouth.
7. **Eye Conditions**

The eyes are prone to injury. Check for evidence of discharge, cloudiness, bleeding or injury. In a brightly lit area, dilated pupils mean fear, pain, excitement, shock or sudden blindness. Make a movement towards each of your cat’s eyes with a finger - if your cat can see the finger he will blink.

**SEEK IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION if**

- The eye is hanging out.
- There is bleeding, swelling or severe bruising around the eye.
- The pupils are dilated and signs of shock are present.
- Your cat appears suddenly blind.

**SEE A VET WITHIN 12 HOURS if**

- The pupil sizes are unequal.
- The eye is cloudy.
- Your cat will not open his eyes.

**SEE A VET WITHIN 24 HOURS if**

- There is a green or yellow discharge from the eyes.
- Your cat is rubbing his eyes and face.
- The third eyelid is visible.
8. Ear Conditions

Bleeding from either the ears or nose after trauma indicate concussion is possible and so **IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION** should be sought. Examine the ear canals for discharge and the pinnae for swelling or pain. Flattened ears can mean pain, distress, weakness or anger.

If your cat is shaking his head and there is waxy or smelly discharge from the ear **SEE A VET WITHIN 24 HOURS.**
EXAMINATION OF THE HEAD AND NECK

Head injuries can cause concussion, (often there will be little or no evidence of damage). Examine the head, cheeks and jaws for swelling or heat. Gently move the cat’s head from one side to the other and up and down to see if this causes any pain - carefully as a cat in pain may lash out! Feel around the neck for stickiness that may indicate a puncture wound eg from a cat bite or air gun pellet.

EXAMINATION OF THE CHEST, ABDOMEN AND LEGS

Run your hands over the cat’s back, chest and groin feeling for heat, sensitivity or stickiness. Car grease or tar can mean your cat has been hit by a car. Cat bites usually discharge fluid and the surrounding hair will be sticky and clumped. Part the hair and look for bruising. Examine each leg in turn noting any damage to the nails. Feel each joint and bend and flex it - note any evidence of pain or heat.

Try to learn to feel your own cat’s bladder when he is relaxed. Some urinary problems can be life threatening if the bladder becomes distended with urine due to blockage. Often signs can be missed and misinterpreted as constipation with disastrous results. If you are able to feel a hard mass the size of an orange in your cat’s abdomen and he is going to the litter tray more often than usual and not passing urine seek IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION.

EXAMINATION OF THE TAIL, ANUS AND GENITALS

On running your hands along the length of the tail there should not be any areas of heat or obvious bumps, The base of the tail is a common site for bite wounds so take in examining this area and watch for the cat lashing out.

A limp tail should be pinched to assess if the cat will respond. If there is no response there may be a spinal injury.

The anus should be clean and free from waste. If you can smell pungent anal glands it is likely your cat has been frightened or injured so look for further signs of injury or shock.
Examine the penis or vagina for evidence of inflammation or discharge.

THE SKIN AND FUR

A cat whose coat is normally kept sleek and tidy who becomes unkempt and tatty should be examined as this is a sign of illness or injury.

Cat who have suddenly started scratching or biting themselves or showing self mutilation should be seen by a vet IMMEDIATELY.

A cat who is scratching should be checked for fleas. SEE A VET WITHIN 24 HOURS if the behaviour does not subside after the application of an approved antiparasiticide.

If swellings or lumps appear quickly, SEE A VET WITHIN 24 HOURS. If the swellings and lumps are slow to form SEE A VET SOON.

If you notice areas of baldness SEE A VET SOON.

If you find grease or oil on your cat, examine him for signs of injury, and check he is breathing normally. If you are worried, SEEK VETERINARY ADVICE OR ASSISTANCE. If he otherwise seems normal, wash him with warm water and washing up liquid to emulsify the contaminants.

If your cat has broken nails, examine him fully in case he has been in a road traffic accident. Trim any nails that have half broken and SEEK VETERINARY ADVICE OR ASSISTANCE if you are worried.
THE ALIMENTARY SYSTEM

Cats are generally fastidious creatures but some gastrointestinal problems can be quite serious. If a cat vomits or passes diarrhoea that is black or bloody, the vomit is persistent or projectile, the diarrhoea is explosive, or you are aware the cat may have ingested something dangerous, SEEK IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION.

If your cat has vomited and has diarrhoea, has diarrhoea that continues after 24hrs fasting or your cat hasn’t eaten for 24hrs you should SEE A VET WITHIN 24 HOURS.

If your cat is losing weight, drinking more or less than usual, eating more or less than usual or has a change in consistency of faeces then SEE A VET SOON.

THE BLADDER

SEEK IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION if your cat is straining but unable to urinate or hasn’t passed urine in 24hrs.

SEE A VET SOON if your cat is urinating more frequently than usual, is urinating in inappropriate areas, has blood present in the urine or seems incontinent.
COPING IN AN EMERGENCY SITUATION

It is important to remember when an emergency arises to first assess the situation and the cat’s condition. Of paramount importance is to not endanger yourself or the cat further and do no harm.

SEEK IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION IF:

- The cat is in pain
- The cat is collapsed
- The cat is very distressed
- There are signs of shock
- The cat is unable to move
- There are obvious injuries
- Poisoning is likely
- Head trauma
- Breathing difficulties

In other situations, first aid is likely to be effective.
PROBLEMS WITH KITTENING

Most cats are able to kitten without any assistance. Sometimes, an owner will not know her cat was pregnant until they wake up one morning to three or four additional mouths to feed. No mess, no fuss!

However, sometimes complications do arise. Veterinary advice/attention should be sought if

- No labour is apparent after 66 days of pregnancy (seek advice despite the fact that some normal cats can have a gestational period of up to 74 days)
- The cat fails to go into labour within 24hrs after rectal temperature drops to 37.8 C / 100 F
- The cat fails to produce a kitten within 1hr of the first water bag being seen
- Failure to deliver a kitten after 45 minutes of strong contractions
- More than two hours have elapsed since the last kitten was born.
- There has been bleeding during pregnancy
- Foul smelling discharge is passed during labour
- The mother seems weak or collapsed
Problems with kitting continued

If a kitten is stuck in the birth canal, gently grasp it with a clean, warm towel, apply steady traction in an arc towards the mother’s hind feet until it is delivered. If there is resistance or the kitten is not presented head first with two front legs at either side of the head, **SEEK IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION.**

If a mother is not showing interest in a new born kitten, use a clean towel to remove the membranes from the kitten’s nose and head. Wipe around the kitten’s face, removing fluid from the nostrils. Rub the kitten’s body with a towel to stimulate breathing. If breathing is not forthcoming hold the kitten firmly between your cupped hands and swing rapidly from shoulder height down in an arc to expel fluid from the air passages. Between swings rub the kitten vigorously with a towel. Stop when the kitten moves or cries. If the mother does not chew off the afterbirth, tie a thread around each umbilical cord 2.5cm from the kitten’s abdomen and cut the side of the tie away from the kitten with scissors. Ensure umbilical cords are not long enough to wrap around the kitten’s legs as this can act as a tourniquet.

After the birth, the mother should lick the kittens and encourage them to suckle. **SEE A VET IMMEDIATELY** if the mother is staggering or trembling, straining to urinate, not wanting to eat, producing a foul smelling vaginal discharge or has hard, painful mammary glands.

If the kittens are crying excessively, are regurgitating food, or have a nasal or ocular discharge or diarrhoea, **SEEK IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION.**
BURNS

1\textsuperscript{st} DEGREE BURN - skin is intact and burned by heat

Flush the affected area with cool water as soon as possible. Cover with a non stick bandage to protect the area and stop the cat licking. Change the dressing daily and seek veterinary attention if a smell develops or the affected area covers more than one tenth of the cat’s body surface area.

SKIN INTACT AND BURNED BY CHEMICALS

Flush the area for 20 minutes if your cat will tolerate this. If it is a known acid burn flush with one teaspoon baking soda per pint of water. Cover with a non stick dressing and seek veterinary advice.

2\textsuperscript{nd} DEGREE (PARTIAL) 3\textsuperscript{rd} DEGREE (TOTAL) BURNS - skin barrier breached

TREAT SIGNS OF SHOCK: Apply a sterile, non stick dressing to the area and seek immediate veterinary attention.
CONSTIPATION

Constipation usually arises due to hair and faeces that are too dry to pass through the anus. Other causes of constipation include slow intestinal movement, hernias, tumours and ingested bones and grass. Some neuropathies affecting the nerves that control intestinal contractions cause constipation and often diarrhoea that causes straining can be mistaken for constipation. Constipation is more common in older cats - preparations of liquid paraffin can help keep the stools softened.

- If grass is protruding from the cat’s anus, gently ease it out. Never pull a string or thread from a cat’s anus - it may be long and caught up in the intestines - pulling will cause major damage.

- If faeces are stuck in the hair around the anus, trim carefully with scissors, wash the area with warm soapy water and apply soothing KY jelly.

- See a vet within 24hrs if the cat seems in pain, is vomiting, is passing thin ribbon like faeces, has foul smelling faeces with or without blood, has a bulge to the side of the anus or has material hanging from the anus.
CONVULSIONS / SEIZURES

There are many conditions that can cause a cat to start fitting. Often a cat will be called epileptic if it has recurrent seizures. Other causes include low blood sugar, liver disease, low blood calcium, poor circulation, infection, poisons and brain lesions. The usual presentation for a general convulsion is a collapsed, twitching cat, often lying on its side with the limbs moving and back arching. It will often salivate and roll its eyes and may pass urine or faeces. A milder convulsion can present as a cat staring blankly, walking in circles, bumping into objects and mildly twitching.

Don’t panic if a cat seems to be having a seizure. Avoid putting your fingers near the cat’s mouth as you may get bitten and it is very rare for a cat to choke on his tongue. If you think your cat is having a mild convulsion, try to distract him as this may prevent a full seizure developing. If your cat is having a full seizure, surround him with pillows or cushions to try to prevent injury.

Reduce light levels and background noise. If the seizure stops within four minutes (most last a lot less than this) reassure the cat and keep him in a quiet area where you can monitor him.

If the seizure continues for longer than four minutes or seems to stop then start again SEEK IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION. This is also the case if the cat has potentially been exposed to toxic chemicals or has a temperature greater than 40 degrees C, 104 degrees F.

If this is the first time a cat has had a seizure you should see a vet within 24 hours and don’t be afraid to phone your vet for advice if your cat is on anticonvulsant therapy and has a seizure.
COUGHING

Coughing removes unwanted material from the air passages and can be caused by allergy, pollen, infection, endoparasites, heart problems, chest disease tumours or fluid in the lungs.

If the cough is causing breathing difficulties or there is blood tinged material coughed up SEE A VET IMMEDIATELY.

If your cat has a high temperature, weight loss, lethargy, loss of appetite, exposure to smoke or known heart disease, SEE A VET WITHIN 24 HOURS

If your cat is otherwise normal but has a dry non productive cough, turn the shower on or boil a kettle and fill the room with steam. If your cat tolerates this you can leave him in the room for up to 15 minutes. If the cough has not improved by three days or if your cat seems otherwise ill SEEK VETERINARY ADVICE.
DIABETIC EMERGENCIES

Diabetic emergencies occur when either too much or too little insulin is injected into a diabetic cat. If untreated, both can lead to coma and death.

If a cat on daily insulin therapy suddenly becomes weak, disorientated, changes their behaviour or starts twitching and convulsing it is likely to be hypoglycaemic. Always keep glucose or honey on hand and if these signs are evident give liquid glucose into the cat’s mouth immediately. If the cat is convulsing, rub glucose syrup on the gums and SEEK IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ASSISTANCE. Always make sure your cat has eaten his breakfast before you administer insulin - this is one of the most common causes of insulin overdose. If your cat hasn’t eaten, phone for veterinary advice before you give the insulin.

If a cat is drinking more than usual, eating lots but losing weight or seems weak or depressed, see a vet within 24hrs, ideally bring a urine sample to dip for glucose as your cat may be diabetic. Your vet will probably run blood samples to confirm the diabetes and rule out other conditions.

If your cat is vomiting or has a sweet fruity (pear drop) smell to his breath it is likely he is hyperglycaemic and NEEDS IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION.

If you forgot to give your cat his insulin or only gave part of it, phone your vet for advice. It’s generally wise to err on the side of caution and just wait until the next injection time is due especially in a well cat but this is best discussed with your vet who knows the individual case.
DIARRHOEA

Diarrhoea is a common condition, often caused by diet changes or allergy but also infection, malabsorption problems, metabolic problems or tumours. Immediate veterinary attention should be sought if the diarrhoea is

- Bloody
- Explosive
- Accompanied by vomit
- Causing dehydration
- In a kitten
- Making the cat depressed or weak

If the diarrhoea has been present for more than two days see a vet within 24 hours. Phone for advice if your cat is on antibiotic treatment.

If your cat is otherwise normal,

- Remove food for 12 hours but allow plenty of drinking water.
- Give a kaolin mixture such as Kaogel (one teaspoon per 5kg cat weight) three times a day. DO NOT give milk of magnesia, which looks similar as this is poisonous to cats.
- If diarrhoea persists for more than 24 hours or blood is present, seek veterinary advice
- After 12 hours fasting give your cat a small amount of cooked white fish or chicken. Continue small amounts little and often over next 3-5 days as long as your cat’s faeces is returning to normal. If there is no improvement, consult a vet.

If you change your cat’s diet it is important to do it gradually so as not to upset the gut bacteria and cause diarrhoea. Probiotics may be useful when changing a cat’s diet.
DROWNING

Cats tend to avoid water so drowning is a rare emergency but can happen. If a cat falls into deep water:

- Rescue the cat
- If the cat is conscious, keep it warm and wrap in a towel
- If the cat is unconscious, hold it upside down and gently swing from side to side to drain the lungs of water.
- Position the cat on his side with his head lower than chest, clear debris from the mouth and pull the tongue forward.
- Begin CPR if there is no heartbeat,
- If he is not breathing, give artificial respiration
- SEEK IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION

ELECTRIC SHOCK

The most common cause of electrocution is a cat chewing through an electric cable. Any electric shock can cause cardiac arrest and burns to the affected part of the body. Make sure any power source in the vicinity is turned off and do not put yourself in danger. Use a wooden broom handle to move the cat away from the source of the shock. Give CPR or artificial respiration as necessary. Apply cold compresses to burns to minimise further damage. Watch for signs of shock developing and seek immediate veterinary attention.

Reduce the risk of injury by keeping kittens away from electric cords, apply bitter spray to the cords as a deterrent and reposition or box in cords that look tempting to play with.
EAR INJURIES

• If the ear tip or flap is bleeding, bandage the ear as best you can, if using a head dressing ensure breathing is not restricted and see a vet that day.

• If your cat is shaking his head, scratching at the ear or holding the ear lower on one side he may have a foreign body in the ear, infection or ear mites. See a vet within 24 hours. Don’t poke the ear with anything or apply fluids as this will make matters worse.

• If your cat is losing his balance and co-ordination, he could have an inner ear problem and should be seen by a vet as soon as possible.
EYE INJURIES

All eye injuries are potentially serious as if left untreated. Even a small scratch to the surface of the eye may become infected and lead to loss of vision. Immediate veterinary attention must be sought in the following instances:

- Eyeball out of the socket - do not attempt to push back in - cover with a clean soft damp cloth, ideally soaked in warm saline (0.9% Sodium chloride solution - available to have on hand in first aid kits from most chemists). Get to a vet asap - minutes count if the eye is to be saved.

- Damage to the surface of the eye

- Blood in the eye or a foreign body - apply an Elizabethan collar to avoid further injury if your cat is rubbing at the eye.

- Irregular pupils - also look for signs of other injuries or trauma

- The eye is closed and painful

- One eye looks larger than the other.

Chemical burns - irrigate the eye with sterile saline if available or water for at least five minutes. Use an Elizabethan collar to prevent your cat rubbing his eyes on the way to the veterinary surgery and take along any packaging related to the chemical.

If there is a green or yellow discharge from an eye or the eyes seem inflamed and bloodshot, veterinary attention should be sought within 24 hours. Clear the discharge by gentle bathing with cooled down boiled water. If the discharge is clear or colourless or your cat is sneezing and rubbing his face, he may have an allergy. Clear the discharge with cooled boiled water - your cat may need eye drops to reduce the inflammation or may need his tear ducts flushing - seek veterinary advice.
FAINTING

Fainting rarely occurs in cats but is more likely to occur in flat faced breeds such as Persians.

Fainting occurs when the brain has a temporary deficit of oxygen or sugar. Coughing fits, low blood glucose and heart disease can all cause fainting. When a cat faints he will start by being weak and uncoordinated, collapse into unconsciousness and recover within minutes. Ensure the tongue is pulled forward to maintain an open airway, check for signs of shock and keep your cat quiet for at least 1 hour following the faint. Record when and where the faint happened and seek veterinary advice if there are recurrent episodes.
FISH HOOKS

Fish hooks can become embedded in the paws, lips, tongue, oesophagus or stomach if swallowed. Never pull a fishing line hanging from a cat’s mouth as this can lead to severe damage. Any fish hooks in the mouth or suspected of being swallowed should be dealt with by a veterinary surgeon. If the cat is amenable and the hook is on an external area such as the lip or paw, the barb of the fishing hook should be cut off with wire cutters and the hook pulled out in the direction it entered.
FRACTURES

See a vet immediately if

- A cat has an arched back, is paralysed or in extreme pain when the back is touched - this is likely to be a broken back. Transport the cat on a flat board.

- If a cracking sound was heard at the time of injury, a broken bone is visible, a limb is hanging limp or there is sudden pain and swelling the cat probably has a broken bone. Support the limb on a clean towel and cover open fractures with gauze or light cotton while transporting to the vet. **Do not try to correct broken bones or dislocations - this must be done by a vet under general anaesthesia.**

- Rib fractures cause hard bulges to the chest wall. If the chest cavity has been penetrated, a sucking sound may be heard and/or a soft bulge as air tries to escape through the muscle. Torn sheets can be wrapped round the cat’s chest, start with the area of soft bulge. The dressing should be firm but not so firm as to interfere with breathing. The cat should be transported with the injured lung on the side the cat is lying. If the tail is hanging limp, is bent or swollen and inactive, it is probably fractured. **Do not attempt to bandage it.** Veterinary attention should be sought for pain relief.
FROSTBITE AND HYPOTHERMIA

When a body is chilled by exposure to extreme cold, hypothermia can result. Extremities such as the ears and tail have little protection and can suffer from local freezing i.e. frostbite.

This is characterised by pale or red and puffy extremities and pain when the extremities are touched. If the core temperature drops significantly, life is threatened (rectal temperature below 36.7 degrees Celsius, 98 degrees Fahrenheit). Immersion in cold water causes hypothermia.

- Check for and treat signs of shock and seek immediate veterinary attention.

- Keep the cat warm during transport to the surgery but avoid sources of direct heat like hot water bottles as this can lead to vasodilation of the skin vessels and further heat loss.

- Loosely wrap the cat in bubble wrap or tin foil then a thin blanket and keep the ambient temperature warm.

- Your vet may need to provide warm intravenous fluids and enemas and will continue the process of slowly re heating your cat.

Frostbitten areas can recover once blood flow returns to the damaged parts. However, if damage is extensive and for a prolonged period, the skin may die and the area may need to be surgically removed.
HEART FAILURE

Heart failure is unlikely to be a sudden occurrence as cats can compensate very well up to a point with a failing heart. However, the initial signs may present very suddenly when the cat is unable to cope. One of the most common signs is breathing difficulty due to the accumulation of fluid in the cat’s lungs. This can present as increased respiratory effort, coughing, mouth breathing or panting. Often on retrospect, the cat has seemed quiet for a few weeks preceding these signs and may have lost some weight.

**Immediate veterinary attention should be sought** if the cat is distressed with his breathing.

**IF THE CAT IS COLLAPSED AND NOT BREATHING** - give CPR if indicated and get immediate veterinary help.
HEATSTROKE

Cats have inadequate means of losing body heat through panting and sweating through their pads. If the surrounding temperature is too high, body temperature rises rapidly and death quickly follows. The warm interior of tumble dryers is attractive to cats; always make sure your cat is not inside before closing the door and turning the dryer on.

Signs of heatstroke include:

- Panting and a glazed expression,
- Copious salivation,
- Red gums,
- Increased heart rate
- Rectal temperature of 40.6 degrees Celsius, 105 degrees Fahrenheit.
- The cat should be removed from the hot environment immediately, immersed in cool (not freezing) water or cool water poured over him, encouraged to drink small amounts of cold water at a time (placing ice cubes in a bowl can encourage this).
- The temperature should be taken every five minutes until it has fallen below 39.4 degrees Celsius, 103 degrees Fahrenheit.
- If indicated, treat for shock and get immediate veterinary treatment.
- Massage the legs vigorously to aid circulation and reduce the risk of shock.
- Your vet may want to give intravenous fluids and cold enemas to reduce the temperature further.
- NEVER GIVE ASPIRIN TO REDUCE A CAT’S TEMPERATURE.
- Reduce the risk of developing heatstroke by always providing good ventilation, access to shade and water, never leaving your cat in a car for prolonged periods especially in warm weather and ensuring fat cats, old cats and Persian cats always have access to cool rooms and plenty of water.
INJURY TO SKIN

If signs of shock are present seek immediate veterinary attention and assume greater trauma than that you can see.

If your cat is otherwise OK but resents you touching a particular area look for any visible signs of bruising, abrasion or puncture - phone your vet for advice but if you are worried seek veterinary attention the same day. If there is a small cut, ideally remove the surrounding hair with scissors and gently clean the area with salt water. Stop your cat excessively licking by applying an Elizabethan collar and monitor the area for signs of increasing redness or infection in which case you may need to see a vet to obtain treatment.

You must seek immediate veterinary attention if your cat has any of the following injuries

- Wound caused by a knife, arrow, bullet or impalement injury
- Ongoing bleeding after three minutes of applied pressure
- Signs of shock
- Abnormal breathing
- Obvious pain and distress
- Bites by other animals

Never remove a penetrating object - either move the cat with the object in situ or in the case of impalement on railings get a veterinary surgeon to come out. Fatal consequences are unfortunately often inevitable when a cat is removed from an impaling object.

Serious deep injuries can often occur without any visible superficial damage. It is vital to perform a thorough examination if you suspect your cat has had a traumatic incident to identify any indicating factors so veterinary attention and treatment can be sought as quickly as possible.
LAMENESS

Trauma often causes fractures, dislocations, sprains (stretching or tearing of ligaments and tendons) and strains (stretching of muscles around joints - uncommon in cats). Immediate veterinary attention should be sought if there is lameness with pain, distress and sudden weakness, visible bone or abnormal bend to the limb, history of trauma or loss of control of bowel or bladder.

Veterinary attention should be sought either the same day or within 24 hours if a joint is hot, swollen or painful or the cat is unable to bear weight.

If your cat is in shock seek immediate veterinary attention

eg. paracetamol or ibuprofen. Cats are unable to cope with these drugs. They are ineffective, and giving them will cause irreversible organ damage and death.
Lameness continued

If your cat is limping but still eating and otherwise normal, try keeping him in and resting him for 48 hours. If he seems to improve, continue to keep him rested.

It is wise not to allow your cat out while he is lame as it compromises his ability to escape from danger, putting him at risk of further damage.

If you have an older cat who is progressively ‘stiff’, or has stopped jumping up onto surfaces it is wise to have him checked over by a vet. Many older cats have arthritic changes going on in their hind limbs and spines and your vet can prescribe routine drugs which can help with the relief of pain and inflammation.
LOSING BALANCE

There are number of conditions which result in the loss of balance and coordination. These include:

- Concussion
- Diabetic crisis
- Shock
- Ear infection
- Vestibular disease (inner ear)

Signs to check for when examining your cat include a history of trauma, especially note the size of your cats pupils - they should be equal, if one is larger than the other it is likely your cat has head a head injury and/or is suffering from an intracranial event and veterinary attention should be sought immediately. A history of increased thirst is likely to point to diabetes; increased appetite and weight loss are also likely to be present. It is possible your cat is going into a hyperglycaemic state so veterinary attention should be sought as soon as possible. Ear infections generally cause head shaking and scratching of ears with or without discharge. Some ear infections involving the middle ear will just show as loss of balance however. If the eyes are moving from side to side either quickly or slowly, this is a sign called nystagmus and is characteristic of inner ear infection or vestibular disease - veterinary attention should be sought as soon as possible.

It is important to stop your cat injuring himself by falling if he seems unbalanced. All cases of loss of balance should be taken to see a veterinary surgeon.

MOUTH CONDITIONS

It is not normal for your cat to drool saliva, drop his food or show signs of pain when his jaws are opened or his mouth touched.
An offensive odour from a cat’s mouth is not normal and can be due to a tooth root infection, gingivitis, presence of a foreign body or a tumour. If bleeding is present check whether your cat is showing signs of shock or has any other injuries. Kittens can bleed from their mouths when they are teething. If your cat is pawing at his face, wants to eat but does not seem able you should see a vet as soon as possible, likewise if there is any swelling around the face or an unpleasant smell.

**NASAL PROBLEMS**

If there is bleeding from one or both nostrils check history for potential trauma and check for other injuries. **Seek immediate veterinary attention if signs of shock accompany bleeding.** Cats are prone to getting foreign bodies like grass blades up their noses and will often present with sneezing, possibly pawing at the face, difficulty swallowing and a discharge from the nostril, possibly with blood staining. Tumours can also give these signs and are more prevalent in older cats, especially if recent weight loss is a factor. Your veterinary surgeon is likely to need to anaesthetize your cat to look up the nose and back of the throat and may need to take some radiographs. Once foreign bodies are removed, cats tend to recover well.
POISONING

Skin Contact

Chemicals that cats rub against can irritate and burn the skin. Often a cat will try to clean himself by licking and cause burning of the mouth at the same time as ingesting the chemical which can cause systemic poisoning. Poisoning can cause signs of shock, convulsions, pain and becoming uncoordinated. If any of these signs are apparent OBTAIN IMMEDIATE VETERINARY ATTENTION.

As long as your cat is not showing any of the above signs and has not had chance to lick the area you can try to remove the contaminant. For paint, tar or motor oil, rub a large amount of vegetable oil into the contaminated area, wear rubber gloves to do this. If the contaminant has hardened and dried on the hair it is best to remove by cutting the hair with scissors rather than softening and removing. Use washing up liquid or baby shampoo to wash away the loosened contaminant. Continue rinsing and repeating until all of the contaminant is removed. If the contamination is extensive, add flour to the vegetable oil to help absorb the poison before rinsing.

If the contamination is with anything other than paint, tar, petroleum products or motor oil, flush the area with copious amounts of clean water for 5 -15 minutes before washing with a warm soap solution. If your cat wants to lick himself, prevent this using an Elizabethan collar.

NEVER USE PAINT STRIPPER, TURPENTINE, METHYLATED SPIRIT OR CONCENTRATED BIOLOGICAL DETERGENT TO REMOVE CONTAMINATION.

NEVER USE FLEA TREATMENTS INDICATED FOR DOGS ON CATS - dog treatments, especially those bought at pet shops often contain PERMETHRIN which is toxic to cats and causes death. In the early stages permethrins cause convulsions and poor coordination, in the later stages death ensues unless immediate veterinary intensive treatment is instigated - even then the prognosis is poor.
Inhaled

Never endanger yourself by entering an environment containing dangerous toxic fumes.

Inhaled poisons interfere with breathing, can affect the eyes, cause shock and inflame the respiratory tract. Signs of this include unconsciousness, incoordination, deep red gums, breathing with increased effort, coughing with or without the expulsion of blood. Smoke inhalation is a common result of house fires. Carbon monoxide poisoning can occur for example if a cat is in a garage with a car engine running or in a house with faulty heating. For all inhaled poisons maintain the cat’s open airway, assist breathing and circulation with CPR if necessary and seek immediate veterinary attention.

Swallowed

Cats are generally fastidious creatures so tend to be sensible about what they eat hence accidental poisoning is rare. Cats are likely to be poisoned by people trying to help them by giving medicines designed for human or other animal use, licking toxic or burning chemicals off themselves, eating prey that has itself eaten poison and unfortunately by malicious poisoning.

- Seek immediate veterinary attention if your cat:
  - is unconscious
  - has stopped breathing (give CPR on way)
  - is convulsing
  - has swallowed a substance you know to have been acid, alkali or petroleum based
  - is in shock
NEVER INDUCE VOMITING IN A CAT THAT HAS SWALLOWED ACID, ALKALI OR PETROLEUM BASED PRODUCTS eg.

- Caustic soda
- Chlorine bleach
- Dishwasher granules
- Drain cleaner
- Kerosene (paraffin)
- Laundry detergents
- Lye
- Oven cleaner
- Paint stripper and remover
- Paint thinner
- Petrol
- Furniture, floor or shoe polish
- Toilet cleaner
- Wood preservative

**Acidic poisons** - give egg white, bicarbonate of soda, charcoal powder or olive oil by mouth. See your vet immediately.

**Alkali poisons** - give egg white, small amounts of citrus fruit juice or vinegar. Pour vinegar on alkali burns to the skin or mouth. See your vet immediately.

If your cat is conscious and alert but you are aware that he has ingested a substance other than acid, alkali or petroleum based within the last two
hours, phone your vet for advice and induce vomiting by giving your cat a large crystal of washing soda. Monitor your cat closely and seek immediate veterinary attention if any deterioration in your cat’s health occurs.

**Drain cleaner, solvents, paint stripper, products with acid or alkali symbol on labels.** Cats are generally poisoned by these substances if they have licked contaminated areas on their fur. Often these substances are wrongly used to clean other contaminants off a cat’s coat. These poisons cause inflammation of the skin, vomiting, diarrhoea, possible convulsions, depression, coughing, abdominal pain and redness of the mouth and tongue.

**Get immediate veterinary help.**

**Insecticides** containing organophosphates and carbamates including flea collars, concentrated washes, shampoos and sprays. Poisoning often occurs as cat licks these products from its coat.

Carbamates can cause;
- Agitation
- Restlessness
- Twitching
- Salivation
- Convulsions
- Coma

Organophosphates can cause;
- Hind leg weakness
- Breathing difficulty
- Muscle tremor
- Salivation
- Increased urination / defecation
If consumed induce vomiting if the cat is conscious and alert but do not delay in getting immediate veterinary attention.

**Rodent poison**

Check the packaging to find the chemical name of the poison or bring a sample of the poison to the veterinary surgery. Remember, cats are usually poisoned by eating prey that has itself been poisoned by the rodenticide.

Warfarin (a common rat poison) can cause;

- Vomiting
- Lethargy
- Sign of internal bleeding
- Pale gums and signs of shock
- Bruising to skin

If you know that a cat has eaten a poisoned rodent, induce vomiting then give activated charcoal by mouth. Seek immediate veterinary attention. Warfarin poisoning can be fatal but vitamin K given by injection by your vet can help.

Strychnine can cause;

- Tenseness or stiffness
- Convulsions
- Obtain immediate veterinary attention - strychnine can be fatal within one hour.

Sodium fluoroacetate can cause;

- Initial excitement followed by depression
- Convulsions
- Vomiting
• Repeated urination and defecation
• Induce vomiting, give activated charcoal and get immediate veterinary attention.

**Slug and snail bait - metaldehyde**

Under normal circumstances, cats are unlikely to eat metaldehyde of their own accord but may eat slugs poisoned by it or meat maliciously laced with it.

Metaldehyde causes;

• Tremors
• Salivation
• Convulsions
• Coma

If recently swallowed i.e. within 2 hours induce vomiting and seek immediate veterinary attention.

**Antifreeze - ethylene glycol**

The taste of ethylene glycol appeals to some cats and they will lick it as it leaks from car radiators. Ethylene glycol poisoning is generally fatal.

Ethylene glycol causes;

• Wobbling
• Convulsions
• Vomiting
• Collapse
• Acute renal failure
• Coma

Induce vomiting and give activated charcoal. Obtain immediate veterinary attention - if your vet is a large distance away, give small amounts of alcohol by mouth.

Aspirin

The most common cause of poisoning is when owners give human medications to cats thinking they are helping them with pain relief.

Aspirin can cause;

• Poor appetite
• Depression
• Abdominal cramp
• Vomiting with or without blood
• In coordination

Never give aspirin to your cat, but if the cat ingests aspirin accidentally, induce vomiting with washing crystals, give no further medication and seek immediate veterinary attention.

Illegal drugs e.g. cannabis, ecstasy

Cats are poisoned by finding illegal drugs or if someone purposefully gives them to the cat. Signs of poisoning include becoming uncoordinated, agitation, fear biting and dilated pupils.

Seek immediate veterinary attention and avoid unnecessary sensory stimulation with light and sound.
Sedatives, anti depressants and anti anxiety drugs

Prescription medications can be eaten by cats if left around or intentionally given to cats. Tricyclic antidepressants can cause fatal heart arrythmias (irregular heartbeat) in cats.

These drugs can cause;

- Depression
- Staggering
- Restlessness or agitation
- Erratic heartbeat
- Deep sleep or coma

Keep your cat warm and consult your veterinary surgeon immediately for advice.

REMEMBER:
NEVER GIVE PRESCRIPTION OR PROPRIETARY MEDICATION TO YOUR CAT even preparations for children and infants and is it generally the actual drug that a cat’s metabolism is unable to cope with rather than the dose.

KEEP ALL CLEANING PRODUCTS, GARDEN AND GARAGE CHEMICALS LOCKED OUT OF THE REACH OF CATS.

WHEN USING WEED KILLER OR PEST POISON, KEEP YOUR CAT OUT OF THE AREA AND FOLLOW THE MANUFACTURER'S INSTRUCTIONS.

DO NOT USE ON CATS INSECTICIDAL PRODUCTS INDICATED FOR OTHER ANIMALS.

KEEP ALL HUMAN AND ANIMAL MEDICATIONS IN THEIR ORIGINAL CONTAINERS - note the number of tablets present.
Poisonous Plants

Cats will often play with, chew and eat plants in the house and garden.

Very dangerous poisonous plants include;

- Castor oil plant (Ricinus communis)
- Dumbcane (Dieffenbachia)
- Mistletoe (Viscum album)
- Thorn apple or Jimsonweed (Datura stramonium)
- Cherry laurel
- Hemlock
- Ivy leaves and berries
- Lily
- Oleander
- Yew

Other poisonous plants;

- Amaryllis
- Autumn crocus (Colchicum autumnale)
- Bleeding heart (Dicentra spectabilis)
- Bloodroot (Sanguinaria canadensis)
- Flower bulbs of any kind
- Foxglove (Digitalis purpurea)
- Jerusalem cherry (Solanum pseudocapsicum)
- Larkspur (Delphinium)
- Lily of the valley (Convallaria majalis)
- Mushrooms
- Rhubarb (Rheum rhaponticum)
- Stinging nettle (Urtica dioica)
- Virginia creeper
- Azalea
- Box
- Chinaberry tree
- Horsechestnut
- Laburnum
- Privet
- Rhododendron
- Wisteria
PORCUPINE QUILLS

Porcupines use their quills as defence from predators. The quills are loosely attached and are easily dislodged on contact. The quills have small backward projecting scales near the tips that keep them embedded in the skin.

It is important to remove all the quills carefully. They damage easily and can snap, leaving some within the skin, so it is important to seek veterinary advice and possibly have the quills removed whilst the cat is under general anaesthesia.

Quills can easily break off and be hidden under your cat’s fur. Carefully feel all over your pet’s entire body, ensuring that no quills remain.

PUNCTURE WOUNDS

The most common puncture wounds are bites from other cats, often leaving superficial skin wounds, finding a damp patch of matted hair. Beneath the skin, however, pus can build up causing an abscess that can cause further spread infection around the body. Bites can puncture the chest and cause a pneumothorax. Bites to the abdomen can cause damage to organs and internal bleeding. Other examples of puncture wounds are if a sharp object penetrates the cat e.g. a nail from a fence, arrow, knife or gun pellet.

When cats develop abscesses you may notice a swelling with a sticky area where the abscess is trying to burst. Before this stage the area is likely to be very painful due to the pressure of the abscess building up. If you are aware your cat has been fighting it is best to take your cat to a vet as the abscess may need draining and almost certainly antibiotics. If the abscess bursts of its own accord you will often see a hole in the skin. Clip the hair around this area carefully with round end scissors and clean the area with warm salt water. Gently apply pressure around the area to try to remove as much pus as possible and look for any obvious foreign bodies like grass.
seeds or splinters. Again, it is likely your cat will need antibiotics so seek veterinary attention.

Sometimes abscesses can cause cats to have a fever and go off their food - usually the administration of antibiotics by a veterinary surgeon and possibly draining the abscess will help. You can encourage abscesses to burst by applying alternate warm and cool compresses to the area. Remember cats that have not been eating for longer than one day should be seen by a veterinary surgeon

If the chest is punctured, cover the wound with a clean damp cloth and bandage the chest to seal the wound.

Get immediate veterinary assistance.

- Do not remove any objects that are still penetrating the cat as this may have fatal consequences.

- Air pellet injuries can cause problems as the surrounding hair is pushed into the wound on entry of the pellet so the injury may be difficult to spot. Your cat will be tender around the area but other signs will depend on the location of the wound.

- If an arrow or other projectile has penetrated your cat DO NOT REMOVE. Instead, cut the penetrating object at about 5 cm from your cats body, and bandage tightly around the point of entry to prevent further internal damage by movement. Get immediate veterinary assistance.

- Tetanus is uncommon in cats but can thrive in deep wounds, so monitor for signs of increased sensitivity to light and sound, stiff ears, inability to stand and paralysis in the 5 -15 day period following a penetration injury.
SCRATCHING

Allergic reactions and infestation with the sarcoptes mite that causes scabies in humans can cause intense scratching leading to self inflicted injury. Cats can have allergies to things they have ingested e.g. food, medication, things they have had skin contact with e.g. stinging nettles, washing powders or insects that have stung or bitten them e.g. wasp, bees or ants. Scratching can also be caused by infestations of fleas and mites and regular flea prevention with a product specifically designed for use in cats is recommended.

Check your history of feeding. Have you recently changed food types or brands, and does your cat hunt or go elsewhere to eat? Check when you last applied an approved flea treatment product and look for tell tail signs of parasite infestation i.e. flea dirt and presence of actual fleas. (Dabbing flea dirt with damp cotton wool will show a colour change from black to red - this is the blood in the flea faeces). Look for signs of redness and infection of the skin. If the skin seems normal, rinse the cat thoroughly with clean warm water - do not add any shampoo or soap. Repeat this for two to three times, then gently towel dry your cat. If scratching persists, or if the skin is in any way damaged, consult your vet.
SNAKE BITES

In venomous snakes, the severity of the bite varies with the species of snake, number of bites and amount of injected venom.

Certain snake venoms attack the nervous system which can lead to seizures, weakness and coma. Bites from vipers cause the area to become black.

Most bites occur on the face or neck as the cat tries to catch the snake.

If your cat is bitten by a snake it is vital to:

- Check for shock
- Keep your cat as quiet and relaxed as possible. Any movement or excitement speeds up blood flow, therefore increasing movement of the venom to other parts of the body.
- Seek immediate veterinary advice
- Rinse the wound, trying to remove as much of the venom as possible. Flush the wound with cool running water.
- Apply a cold compress: this will slow blood circulation and prevent the poison spreading. It will also reduce pain and swelling.
- Lower the affected area: if your cat has been bitten on a limb, keep the limb lower than the rest of the body, this makes it more difficult for the venom to spread.

If you live in an area with poisonous snakes, it is helpful to have a venom vacuum, as an aid to removing venom.
**SPIDER BITES**

Most spider bites are not poisonous. If the spider is non-venomous you may see a small localised red mark at the area of the bite.

If the spider is venomous some of the symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Shock
- Seizures
- Paralysis

**Common poisonous spiders are:**

1. **Black Widow:** Identified by a bright red circle on the abdomen. They are the size of a large pea but very dangerous. They build webs in cool, dark places.

2. **Brown Rescue Spiders:** Identified by a violin shape on the chest. Bites from this spider cause the tissue to die, turning black and can lead to a serious ulcer or infection if not treated immediately.

If you suspect your cat has been bitten by a poisonous spider, seek immediate veterinary advice

- Keep your cat as quiet and relaxed as possible, any movement or excitement speeds up blood flow, therefore increasing movement of the venom to other parts of the body.

- Seek immediate veterinary advice

- Rinse the wound, trying to remove as much of the venom as possible. Flush the wound with cool running water.

- Apply a cold compress: this will slow blood circulation and prevent the venom spreading. It will also reduce pain and swelling.

- Lower the affected area: if your cat has been bitten on a limb, keep the limb lower than the rest of the body, this makes it more difficult for the venom to spread.
SWALLOWED OBJECTS

Kittens and young cats are more prone to swallowing things they shouldn’t (generally, items attached to strings as they are playing). Some items are small enough to pass through the stomach and intestines but some get stuck along the way either at the stomach or in the intestines where they cause a blockage. Obstructions cause vomiting, retching or gagging depending on their location. Sometimes cats will be off their food or other times they will eat and vomit part digested or whole food. Faeces may or may not continue to be passed depending on whether the obstruction is total or partial. Of particular concern are threads and strings (otherwise known as linear foreign bodies) as these can cause the intestines to become concertinaed in a process called enteroplication. The cord cuts into the intestine and causes major problems. If a large proportion of the intestine is involved the prognosis is guarded and the cat is likely to die or need euthanised. In all cases of ingested foreign bodies, seek immediate veterinary help especially if your cat is showing sign of obstruction.
SWOLLEN PAWS

The most common causes of swollen paws are abscesses due to cat bites. Other causes include insect stings, foreign body penetration and rubber bands entangled round the legs.

Examine your cat, remove any obvious bands or foreign bodies. If pus is present or the swelling is not resolving in 24 hours seek veterinary help.
URINARY PROBLEMS

Male cats are prone to urinary tract blockages due to the anatomy of their long thin ureters. Plugs of material or crystals can block the flow of urine from the bladder leading to discomfort, pain and rupture if not treated, and this can lead to shock and death. A cat will often frequent the litter tray more often, cry, strain and only produce small amounts of urine, if any. This is an emergency situation and your cat needs immediate veterinary attention. Cats can also get cystitis (inflammation of the bladder) either due to infection or presence of crystals. In some cases the cause is unknown, and termed idiopathic cystitis. These cats are generally eating and otherwise normal but urinate more frequently and possibly inappropriately. They may pass small amounts of cloudy urine with or without blood and may be licking their genitals more frequently. These cats should be seen within 24 hours. If you are able to obtain a urine sample before you get to the vets this is of great assistance in trying to determine the underlying problem. Collect the sample in a clean container or use cotton wool to soak it up and put the sample in a sealed plastic bag to retain moisture.
VOMITING

Signs of nausea and impending vomiting include lip licking, swallowing, and salivation. Cats often vomit to remove hairballs from their stomachs. Vomiting however can also indicate more serious conditions.

Seek immediate veterinary attention if the vomit is black, projectile, continuous or occurring in a kitten. If fever, restlessness, abdominal pain, bloody diarrhoea or unsuccessful attempts to urinate are present, seek immediate veterinary help.

- If the vomiting has occurred less than three times and is not accompanied by any other problems like diarrhoea, withhold food for 12 hours and give small sips of water.
- Offer bland food like white fish or chicken - 1-2 teaspoonfuls every hour - if this is not vomited, and offer a little more every 1-2 hours.
- If the vomiting has resolved, continue light feeding for 1-2 days then gradually reintroduce your cat’s normal food.
- If a vomiting sequence re-occurs arrange to see your vet.
**OBSERVATION CHECK LIST**

- Demeanour i.e. alert, depressed, anxious, aggressive
- Appetite i.e. increased, decreased, vomiting
- Thirst i.e. increased or decreased
- Faeces i.e. hard, soft, liquid, blood
- Urination i.e. increased, decreased, inappropriate, blood
- Activity / mobility i.e. increased or decreased
- Breathing - laboured, increased, noisy, coughing / sneezing
- Ears - discharge, painful, redness, scratching
- Mouth / teeth - smelly, painful, discharge, mucous membrane colour and moisture
- Skin - scratching, redness, flaky, dull coat, hair loss, lumps / growths
- Parasite control - fleas and worms
- Vaccination history
- History of any other animals in house / in contact being ill.
- Temperature, pulse and respiration compared to previous value
CONTENTS OF CAT FIRST AID KIT

Suitable container:
• Clean sealable plastic box or bag.

Cleaning materials:
• Cotton wool
• Cotton buds
• Sterile saline

Dressing materials:
• 7.5cm squared sterile non stick gauze pads
• 2.5cm and 5cm bandage ie Treatwrap
• Conforming bandage ie Coflex
• 1cm adhesive tape ie Micropore
• Cotton wool roll

**Equipment:**

• Digital rectal thermometer
• Fine tip tweezers
• Blunt tip scissors
• Nail clippers
• Elizabethan collar
• Plastic gloves
• 5ml plastic syringe
• Eye dropper
• blanket and bubble wrap
• Travelling box
• Towel and muzzle

**Medication:**

• Over the counter soothing eye drops e.g. Viscotears
• Ear cleaner eg Leo
• Liquid paraffin ie Katalax
• Kaolin mixture ie Kaogel
• Water based sterile lubricant ie KY Jelly
• Mild shampoo - oatmeal, baby or proprietary sensitive type shampoo, eg Episothe

List of information:

• Emergency contact numbers for your vet or out of hours service.
• List of normal values of your cat’s pulse, respiration rate and temperature.

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