

# Kitten Visit Three: Emergencies and First Aid



Clermont Animal Hospital, Inc.

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## Common Emergency Situations

Clermont Animal Hospital, Inc.

Despite your best efforts to keep your pet safe and healthy, illness and injury may occasionally occur. In emergency situations it is important to know what things you can do to help your pet and how to avoid causing further complications in your pet's condition. Most of all, it is important to remain calm and seek professional help and advice as quickly as possible. This handout is designed to provide you with information on common emergency situations, including how to identify each situation, specific concerns, and what you can do to help your pet. There is also a section at the end of over-the-counter remedies that are safe for use in your pet.

### Clermont Animal Hospital's Emergency Services

At Clermont Animal Hospital, Inc. we do our best to have a doctor available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for emergency consultation and patient care. **To reach our on-call veterinarian, simply call our office number at 513-732-1730.** During regular business hours, our staff will make arrangements for necessary emergency care. It is always better to call in advance so that our staff and doctors can be prepared to offer immediate care upon your arrival.

When you call us after regular hours, our answering service will take your name, telephone number and the details of your pet's problem and then page the on-call doctor. It is important that you stay by the phone and keep the line open until our doctor returns your call. If neither of our doctors is available, our answering service will refer you to one of the local emergency veterinary hospitals or allow you to leave a message for the doctor.

### Insect Bites/Stings/Allergic Reactions

**Identification:** Insect bites/stings usually appear as single or multiple raised pink areas on the skin. These areas may be hot and painful to the touch. Allergic reactions may be more generalized, appearing as bumps or hives over the skin and/or facial swelling. Difficulty breathing and/or collapse may accompany severe allergic reactions.

#### Specific Concerns:

1. **Stingers**—If the insect stinger is still present it is best to remove it with a pair of tweezers.
2. **Identify Cause**—Whenever an allergic type reaction occurs, it is important to identify the cause (if possible) so that future exposure can be minimized/prevented.
3. **Difficulty breathing**—While most reactions can be treated without difficulty, **if your cat experiences any difficulty breathing, immediate medical attention is necessary.**

**How to Help Your Pet:** Benedryl® (see Over-the-Counter Remedies) is frequently all that is needed to treat bites, stings and allergic reactions. If the reaction does not clear up with Benedryl, alone, contact our hospital. In cases of breathing difficulty, call our hospital immediately to arrange for emergency care.

## Bleeding/Cuts

**Identification:** Bleeding cut, scrape or other wound.

### Specific Concerns:

1. **Blood Loss**—While it is uncommon for a cat to lose enough blood to cause medical problems, severe cuts or cuts that sever a major blood vessel can cause rapid blood loss. Below are some important tips to help stop or slow blood loss:
  - Cover the area with a clean cloth, and apply steady pressure until the bleeding stops or until medical attention is available.
  - If the cut is in an area that can be bandaged, a bandage can be applied. If you are bandaging a leg, use roll gauze or an ace bandage. Be sure to start wrapping at the toes, regardless of how high up the injury is, and wrap upward. Failure to do this will cause the bandage to have a tourniquet effect and may cause swelling below the bandage.
2. **Infection**—Infection will depend on the source of injury and if the wound is exposed and contaminated after injury. In cases of a ruptured abscess (see “Cat Fight Injuries” below) or a wound more than 12 hours old, infection may already be present. If this is the case, milky yellow, greenish or brownish fluid (pus) will usually be draining from the wound. If infection is suspected call our office as soon as possible to arrange for a doctor to evaluate and treat your cat. To help minimize infection in fresh wounds:
  - Flush the wound with a diluted Betadine® solution (see Over-the-Counter Remedies). Peroxide and topical antibiotic ointments are not recommended.
  - Keep the wound clean and dry.
  - Keep your cat indoors until the wound is fully healed.
3. **Proper Skin Healing**—In cases where the edges of the cut are gaping apart, suturing (stitches) is usually necessary for proper skin healing. Wounds treated within eight hours can often be sutured more easily than older wounds. For this reason, it is best to get veterinary attention as soon as possible.

**How to Help Your Pet:** Stop bleeding and prevent infection as described above. In cases where the cut is large and skin edges are gaping, immediate veterinary attention is recommended. Minor cuts and scrapes should be seen at the next available appointment time so that damage can be assessed and necessary antibiotics can be started.

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## Cat Fight Injuries/Dog Bite Injuries

**Identification:** In many cases, you may witness the cat fight or attack by a dog. In other cases, your cat may come in with wounds after contact with another animal. Puncture holes from the canine teeth are the most common wounds, but other gashes and scrapes may occur. In some cases, the puncture wounds are hidden by the hair, and the first indication of an injury is the swelling from an abscess several days later. These cats sometimes have other signs including decreased appetite, lethargy and fever.

### Specific Concerns:

1. **Underlying Tissue Damage**—While the bite hole may be small and appear to be a minor injury, dogs and cats often shake when they bite, causing damage to muscles and other tissue in a much larger area. **It is VERY important to have a veterinarian assess the extent of tissue damage, even if the wounds seem small or insignificant.**
2. **Infection**—Due to the large population of bacteria in the attacker’s mouth, infection is very common following bite wound injuries. Even minor abrasions (scrapes) with minimal tissue damage require antibiotics in most cases. If prompt treatment is not sought, infection and/or abscesses can result in devastating complications. If an abscess

forms, there is a risk of systemic infection and severe illness. It is also possible for an abscess to rupture outward, creating a gaping hole and a decaying wound.

3. **Internal Injury**—In severe dog bite injuries, particularly in cases where the injured cat has been lifted off the ground by the attacking animal, internal injuries can result. This is difficult to identify at home. Seek immediate veterinary attention.

**How to Help Your Pet:** If any areas are bleeding, apply pressure with a clean dry cloth until bleeding has stopped. Wounds can be cleaned with dilute Betadine® solution (see Over-the-Counter Remedies). Peroxide and topical antibiotic ointments are not recommended. Seek immediate veterinary advice and or attention.

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### **Traumatic Injuries: Hit by a Car, Gun Shot Wounds, etc.**

**Identification:** In some cases, you may actually see your cat struck by a vehicle, shot or otherwise injured. In many cases, however, you may only note signs of injury when your cat returns after running loose. Common signs include limping, gashes/scrapes, gravel/tar imbedded in the skin, and large areas of bruising. In some cases, cats may be reluctant or unable to move.

#### **Specific Concerns:**

1. **Broken Bones**—Fractures are very common in cats hit by a car and with other high impact traumatic injuries (including gun shot wounds). Limb and pelvic (hip) fractures are the most common. It is important to immobilize your cat as much as possible by putting your cat in a well-padded crate or cage. This will help prevent further damage. If bones are seen jutting out of the skin, it is important to flush this area with saline solution (see Over-the-Counter Remedies) and cover it with a clean cloth or bandage. Flushing with water or antiseptic solutions is not recommended
2. **Neurological Injury**—If the spinal cord has been damaged, your cat may be completely paralyzed or be dragging his or her hind legs. This type of injury is very serious and requires immediate veterinary treatment. Head injuries also will result in neurological signs including a dullness/unresponsiveness, seizures and other more subtle neurological changes.
3. **Shock**—Shock is the body's response to traumatic injury. Cats in shock are usually conscious, but very weak and unable to rise. Their gums are white or grayish, and their breathing is often shallow and rapid. Keep the cat warm and seek immediate medical attention.
4. **Internal Injury/Internal Bleeding**—This is often difficult to identify at home. Any animal with a traumatic injury should be seen by a veterinarian as soon as possible.

**How to Help Your Pet:** Keep your pet warm and immobilized. Seek immediate veterinary care. If your pet is bleeding, apply pressure with a clean cloth until bleeding stops.

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### **Accidental Poisoning**

**Identification:** The following is a partial list of common poisons ingested by pets:

- Medications (including over-the-counter medicines like Tylenol and Advil)
- Antifreeze
- Rat poison
- Cleaning products
- Heavy metals
- Poisonous plants (including all lilies)
- Snail bait
- Illegal drugs

If you have evidence that your pet may have consumed one of these substances, he or she requires immediate medical attention. Each type of poisoning will cause different signs. Watch your pet carefully for changes.

Topical products (products applied to the skin), particularly those for fleas and ticks, can also poison your kitten. If you notice unusual behavior after treatment with topical products, contact our hospital.

#### **Specific Concerns:**

1. **Fast Response Time**—Toxicities treated within two hours after poison ingestion have the best prognosis. After the initial two-hour window, the toxin has already left the stomach, and absorption has begun. Treatment within the first five hours can help decrease absorption.
2. **Toxin Identification**—To provide your pet with the best care, it is important that our veterinarians know all components of any product your pet has ingested AND approximately how much was ingested. Try to have product labels available when you call seeking emergency care, and bring them with you when you come to Clermont Animal Hospital.
3. **Topical (skin) Toxins**—If the suspected cause of toxicity is a topical product such as a flea/tick product, it is important to bathe your pet with dish detergent as soon as signs are noticed. Be sure to read the label carefully on all topical flea products used. Flea/tick products labeled “For Dogs Only” are toxic to cats. Signs of toxicity (poisoning) include pin point or dilated pupils, increased salivation (drooling), tremors/twitching and fever.

**How to Help Your Pet:** If you suspect your pet has been accidentally poisoned, contact our on-call doctor immediately. Do not give your pet anything to eat or drink. In cases of poisons absorbed through the skin, bathe your pet immediately.

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### **Foreign Body Ingestion/Intestinal Obstruction**

**Identification:** If you see your pet eat something that he or she shouldn't, or if you find evidence of chewed objects, contact us at Clermont Animal Hospital. String, thread, ribbon and rubber bands are commonly eaten by cats. In some cases, owners are unaware that this has occurred.

While sometimes objects can pass without a problem, in other cases vomiting and diarrhea occur. If a blockage is present, severe vomiting and/or diarrhea will occur. Any case of repeated vomiting, especially when not associated with eating or drinking, should be treated as a suspected case of intestinal obstruction (blockage). **Seek emergency care.** If severe diarrhea is noted without vomiting, a large bowel obstruction may be present.

#### **Specific Concerns:**

1. **Intestinal Rupture**—Untreated intestinal obstructions can lead to the death of intestinal tissue and the rupture of intestinal contents into the abdomen. This is frequently fatal. For this reason, prompt diagnosis and emergency surgery are required in order to save your pet's life.
2. **Abdominal Pain**—Your pet's belly may be very painful with this condition. Avoid putting pressure on the belly, particularly when lifting your animal.

**How to Help Your Pet:** If your pet is vomiting, withhold all food and water. If vomiting continues, contact our on-call doctor immediately. Be sure to tell our doctor about anything your cat may have ingested that could be causing this problem. If vomiting stops when food and water are withheld, wait 12 hours, then gradually introduce water followed by small servings of a bland diet (see Over-the-Counter Remedies). If vomiting recurs, contact our hospital.

### **Pyometra (Uterine Infection)**

**Identification:** Pyometra is the medical term for a life-threatening uterine infection. Male cats and spayed females are not at risk for this condition. Cats with this condition will act sick and may be lethargic (sluggish), lose their appetite, and/or vomit. They may also drink more water, urinate more and/or have a vaginal discharge.

**Specific Concerns:**

1. **Uterine Rupture**—If the uterus becomes too full of pus, it will rupture into the abdomen. This is frequently deadly. For this reason, prompt diagnosis and emergency surgery are required in order to save your pet’s life.
2. **Kidney Damage**—The toxins associated with bacteria causing pyometra can lead to permanent kidney damage.

**How to Help Your Pet:** If your female cat has not been spayed and is suddenly acting ill and drinking more water, **seek immediate veterinary care**. Do not feed your cat, as emergency surgery may be necessary.

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### **Feline Asthma**

**Identification:** Asthma in cats is usually associated with a cough. Cats may appear to be “coughing up a hairball” when they are really coughing due to asthma. In some cases, particularly in sudden asthma attacks, cats will experience difficulty breathing, open-mouthed, breathing and/or collapse.

**Specific Concerns:**

1. **Causes for Attack**—Cigarette smoke, dust, mold, pollen, air pollution and allergens can all aggravate feline asthma and lead to an attack.
2. **Cats with Diagnosed Asthma**—If your cat has been previously diagnosed with asthma, keep medication on hand in case an asthma attack occurs.
3. **Difficulty Breathing**—In severe attacks, cats may have difficulty breathing. **If this occurs, it is a life-threatening emergency.** Call our on-call veterinarian immediately.

**How to Help Your Pet:** If you suspect your cat is having an asthma attack, call our office immediately. Do your best to keep your cat cool and calm and to eliminate any things that may be aggravating the asthma.

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### **Urinary Obstruction (Blockage)/Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease (FLUTD)**

**Identification:** Urinary obstruction is most common in middle-aged neutered male cats. Obstructed cats cannot urinate. They will make repeated trips to the litter box and spend significant amounts of time straining in the litter box without producing any urine. As the urine accumulates in their bladder, they will act painful and lethargic (sluggish). Vomiting is common. If the condition is not recognized early, cats may collapse. **Untreated, urinary obstruction will lead to death.**

In **feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD)**, cats also make frequent trips to the litter box and are also seen straining in the box. The important difference is that urine is seen. This urine is often in small droplets and is usually bloody. Cats with this condition may also be urinating outside of the litter box.

**Specific Concerns:**

1. **Obstruction is an Emergency**—If your cat is straining and not producing any urine, he should be seen right away. Delays can result in kidney or heart damage or death.
2. **FLUTD**—As long as your cat is producing urine, it does not need emergency care; however, cats with FLUTD are more likely than other cats to become obstructed. Watch closely to ensure that urine is still being produced.

3. **Stress**—Stress has been shown to cause and/or worsen FLUTD. Moving, a new person living in the house, vacation or changes in routine can bring on this condition.

**How to Help Your Pet:** If your cat is straining but not producing urine, contact our on-call doctor immediately. If your cat is straining and producing small amounts of urine, try to decrease stress and encourage as much water consumption as possible. Increased water intake will increase urine production and help to flush out the bladder. Schedule an appointment if straining continues for more than 48 hours. Watch your cat very carefully for obstruction during this time.

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## **Heat Stroke**

**Identification:** A rectal temperature of greater than 104 degrees Fahrenheit (normal temperature is 100-102.5) after heat exposure may indicate overheating. In severe cases of heat stroke, the temperature may be over 107 degrees. Excessive panting or salivation, listlessness, muscle tremors, vomiting/diarrhea and/or collapse may occur in cases of overheating. Common scenarios include animals shut in hot cars, after exercise during hot weather or cats accidentally shut in the dryer. Cats with short noses, such as Himalayans, are particularly sensitive to heat.

### **Specific Concerns:**

1. **DIC**—DIC is a condition in which the blood no longer clots properly. This occurs in some patients with heat stroke. This condition is often fatal, causing bleeding out of all body openings as well as bleeding into the lungs and the skin (petichiae).
2. **Seizures**—As the brain overheats, seizures are common. Without prompt treatment, these can cause permanent brain damage.
3. **Abnormal Heart Rhythms**—Heat stroke can cause potentially deadly changes in your cat's heart rhythm.

**How to Help Your Pet:** It is important to cool your pet as quickly as possible. Use cold water and/or ice packs to help bring your pet's temperature down. Monitor his or her temperature using a rectal thermometer and stop the cooling process as soon as the temperature reaches 103 degrees (additional cooling after this point will drop your pet's temperature too low). **Call our hospital immediately**—additional treatment may be necessary in moderate to severe cases. Avoid any further heat exposure.

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## **Severe Illness:**

**Identification:** Signs will vary with the type of illness. The following signs may warrant emergency attention: severe lethargy/inability to rise, repeated vomiting, severe diarrhea, seizures, sudden collapse, inability to urinate, inability to move limb, difficulty breathing, or severe pain. Please contact our hospital if any of these signs are noted.

**Specific Concerns:** Will vary with illness.

**How to Help Your Pet:** Contact our hospital as soon as any signs are noted. Keep your pet warm and calm. Follow any advice given by our doctors regarding your pet's particular condition.



## Over-the-Counter-Remedies

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### **Benedryl® (Diphenhydramine)**

**Usages:** Benedryl® can be used for allergic reactions including hives, insect stings and mild skin allergies. It also can be used for mild cases of motion sickness.

**Dosage: Cats and Dogs—** 1 - 2 mg/pound

**Precautions/Side Effects:**

1. It may cause sleepiness/lethargy.
  2. If breathing difficulty accompanies an allergic reaction, call our hospital before using Benadryl®.
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### **Bland Diet**

**Usage:** A bland diet can be used in any cat or dog recovering from vomiting, diarrhea or other causes of stomach/intestinal upset.

**Recipe:**

- 3 parts boiled white rice
  - 1 part browned hamburger (rinsed) OR boiled chicken (no skin/bones) OR cottage cheese
- Mix ingredients together. Feed as small, frequent meals. Refrigerate unused portion in an air-tight container.

**\*\*Note\*\*** This recipe can be easily made in large batches by boiling lean hamburger or cut up chicken while boiling the rice in the same pot. This mixture can also be frozen.

**Precautions/Side Effects:**

1. This is not a nutritionally balanced diet. It is intended for short-term use only.
  2. When switching back to regular food, make the transition over a three to five-day period, slowly adding in the original diet and decreasing the bland diet.
  3. If vomiting or diarrhea occurs while your pet is eating this diet, contact our hospital.
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### **Dextromethorphan (Active ingredient in cough suppressants such as Robitussin DM®)**

**Usages:** Dextromethorphan can be used for cough suppression for dry, hacking coughs due to tracheal (wind pipe) irritation or mild kennel cough.

**Dosage:**

Cats and Dogs under 40 pounds—5mg every four hours  
Dogs over 40 pounds—10mg every four hours

**Precautions/Side Effects:**

1. Do not use if cough is soft, moist or productive or if a fever is present except as recommend by a veterinarian.



2. Do not use for coughs associated with pneumonia or heart failure, as this medication can worsen those conditions.
  3. Do not use for more than 48 hours without consulting a veterinarian. A cough may be a sign of a more serious underlying disease.
  4. If asthma is suspected, seek veterinary care.
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### **Hydrogen Peroxide (3%)**

**Usages:** Hydrogen peroxide (3%) is good for cleaning blood and tear stains off of fur.

**Dosage:** Apply a small amount to the fur and wipe off.

**Precautions/Side Effects:**

1. Do not use in cats to induce vomiting (it is sometimes used in dogs for this purpose)
  2. Not recommended for cleaning open wounds because it decreases wound healing
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### **Betadine® (Povidone-Iodine) Solution (0.75%)**

**Usages:** Betadine solution can be used to clean/disinfect superficial and shallow wounds, abrasions (scrapes) and abscess sites.

**Dosage:** Dilute one part Betadine and nine parts water. For more concentrated formulations, more water will be necessary to achieve proper dilution. The diluted solution should be approximately the color of weak tea.

**Precautions/Side Effects:**

1. This product will stain clothes, light colored fur and furniture.
  2. Any wound that breaks through all layers of the skin should be evaluated by a veterinarian. Oral antibiotic therapy and/or suturing may be necessary.
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### **Saline Solution Flush (Physiologic Saline)**

**Usages:** Saline solution can be used to flush deep wounds, to cleanse exposed bones, and to flush irritants out of eyes.

**Sources:** Many contact solutions for soft contact lenses are Physiologic Saline. You may also find it in the first aid section of the pharmacy as a wound flush solution.

**Precautions/Side Effects:**

1. Be sure to use sterile physiologic (0.9% NaCl) saline solution.
2. Cats may become chilled from copious flushing. Be sure to dry your cat and keep him/her warm to prevent this.

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