

# First Aid for Dogs and Cats

## Managing Common Diseases and Symptoms

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As pet owners, it's essential to know basic first aid for your dogs and cats. They rely on you for their well-being, and understanding how to care for them when they are unwell can make a significant difference in their recovery. Common conditions like mange, cold, cough, fever, itching, and fungal infections are not unusual in pets, and with the right knowledge, you can manage their symptoms and provide comfort before seeking veterinary care.

### 1. Mange in Dogs and Cats

Mange is a skin condition caused by parasitic mites. It can be either *sarcoptic mange* (scabies) or *demodectic mange*. Dogs and cats with mange typically show symptoms of intense itching, hair loss, scabs, and red, inflamed skin.

#### First Aid for Mange:

- **Isolate the pet:** Mange is highly contagious, so keep your pet away from other animals.
- **Keep the skin clean:** Gently bathe your pet with mild, hypoallergenic shampoos to help soothe the skin and remove scabs.
- **Topical treatments:** Use over-the-counter treatments like medicated creams or ointments that can help alleviate itching and treat the mites. However, always consult a vet before applying them.
- **Wear gloves:** If you're handling a pet with mange, wear gloves to avoid contamination.

**When to See a Vet:** Mange requires prescription medications like antibiotics, oral anti-parasitic drugs, and medicated shampoos. A vet may also recommend a skin scrape to diagnose the specific type of mange.

### 2. Cold, Cough, and Fever

Cold-like symptoms in pets, such as coughing, sneezing, and fever, can be caused by viral infections, bacterial infections, or even allergies. It's important to monitor the symptoms and provide first aid when necessary.

#### First Aid for Colds, Cough, and Fever:

- **Ensure hydration:** Offer fresh water frequently to help your pet stay hydrated.
- **Rest and warmth:** Ensure your pet stays warm and comfortable in a quiet, cozy area. Rest is crucial for recovery.
- **Humidifier:** Use a humidifier in the room to help loosen mucus and make it easier for your pet to breathe, especially if they are congested.
- **Monitor the fever:** If you suspect your pet has a fever (a temperature above 103°F for dogs, or 102.5°F for cats), you can use a digital thermometer designed for pets to monitor their temperature. Do not administer human fever medication like acetaminophen or ibuprofen, as it is toxic to animals.
- **Coughing:** If your pet is coughing, try to keep them calm and avoid any strenuous activity. Avoid using harsh chemical cleaners or sprays that might aggravate their symptoms.

**When to See a Vet:** If your pet's fever lasts more than 24 hours or they develop severe coughing, wheezing, or difficulty breathing, consult a vet. Respiratory infections can escalate quickly and may require antibiotics or other treatments.

### 3. Itching and Skin Irritation

Itching in dogs and cats can have various causes, from allergies to parasites like fleas or ticks. Symptoms include excessive scratching, biting, and licking of the affected areas, leading to raw, irritated skin.

#### First Aid for Itching:

- **Flea control:** If your pet has fleas, use flea shampoos or flea medication to get rid of them.
- **Anti-itch creams:** Over-the-counter hydrocortisone creams or sprays can help reduce itching. Be sure the product is safe for pets.
- **Oatmeal baths:** Give your pet a soothing oatmeal bath to calm inflamed skin.
- **Cold compress:** Apply a cool, damp washcloth to the affected areas to alleviate discomfort.

**When to See a Vet:** Persistent itching or if the skin becomes infected (red, swollen, or oozing) requires a vet visit. A vet can perform tests to identify the underlying cause, whether it's allergies, bacterial infection, or parasites.

### 4. Fungal Infections (Ringworm etc)

Fungal infections like ringworm are common in both cats and dogs. Ringworm can cause circular patches of hair loss with a red, scaly appearance. Other fungal infections may appear as discoloured patches or sores.

#### First Aid for Fungal Infections:

- **Isolate the pet:** Fungal infections, particularly ringworm, are contagious to both pets and humans, so isolate your pet to prevent spread.

- **Topical antifungal treatments:** Use antifungal creams, shampoos, or sprays available over the counter for treatment.
- **Clean the environment:** Fungal spores can live in the environment, so disinfect your pet's bedding, toys, and any areas where they frequent.
- **Wear gloves:** When treating a pet with a fungal infection, wear gloves to avoid spreading the infection.

**When to See a Vet:** A vet may prescribe oral antifungal medications or stronger topical treatments, especially if the infection is widespread or persistent.

### 5. General First Aid for Sick Pets

Regardless of the specific illness or symptom, here are a few general first aid steps for managing your pet's health before getting professional help:

- **Observe the Symptoms:** Keep a close eye on changes in your pet's behaviour, appetite, and energy levels. Monitoring these factors can help the vet make a better diagnosis.
- **Create a Calm Environment:** Keep your pet in a quiet, comfortable space where they can rest and recover. Avoid stressful situations.
- **Consult a Vet:** If your pet's symptoms persist, worsen, or show signs of severe discomfort, it's important to consult a veterinarian promptly.

While first aid for pets can help in managing minor illnesses or injuries, it's essential to remember that professional veterinary care is often necessary to ensure your pet's health and safety. Prompt attention to symptoms like itching, fever, coughing, or skin infections can prevent further complications. Always consult your vet for advice on treatments and medications that are safe for your pet's specific condition.

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*Dr Mala Mattha is the founder of the Animal Protection Society, Udaipur. See overleaf.* 