



Immediate veterinary attention can mean the difference between life and death for an injured cat after all but the most minor of accidents. Getting your pet to the vet's clinic (where all the necessary equipment is on hand) is quicker and gives it a better chance than calling the vet out to the scene of the accident. The most important thing to remember in an emergency is - don't panic! - this could cause further anxiety for an already frightened animal and it wastes valuable time.

Where do I find emergency treatment?

If it is your own pet that is injured then you should take it to your own vet if possible. However, if the incident occurs when you are away from home you will need to find the nearest veterinary practice. If there are no passers by or local residents to help, find a telephone box and call directory enquiries or ask at the closest police station, post office, village shop, etc. Whether you are near home or away, always telephone the veterinary surgery first as many practices have branch surgeries which are not open all day every day. Alerting the practice staff means that they can give important advice and are ready to deal with your cat immediately upon arrival which may greatly improve its chances of survival.

How do I carry an injured cat?

Any cat in pain is likely to be unpredictable and aggressive. If it can still walk it will probably try to run away and hide. A proper travelling box of plastic or fibreglass is the best way to carry the animal securely and prevent it escaping. If there is no box available a cardboard carrying box like those available from veterinary surgeries or animal welfare charities may be used instead. However, an animal which has collapsed or has been involved in an accident (and so may have spinal injuries) should be moved as little as possible to avoid causing further damage. A sheet of wood, heavy card or even a blanket held taut can serve as a makeshift stretcher - the cat should be lifted gently on to the stretcher and put carefully into the back of the car.

What if I do not have a car?

If the vet's clinic is within easy walking distance or there is no way of getting there by car, it may be possible to carry a cat with only minor injuries. But it is very important to avoid getting injured yourself as a cat bite can result in painful bruising and very unpleasant infection. Wrapping the cat in a blanket or coat will help to restrain it. The cat's body should be held with one arm, supporting its weight with your forearm, while using the other hand to hold it firmly but gently beneath the chin. Some taxi firms will carry animals - but make sure you warn them when you book the taxi that you have a sick pet.

What first aid should be given?

The aim of any first aid is to keep your cat alive and comfortable until it can receive proper veterinary treatment. The most important tasks are to ensure that your cat can breathe comfortably, to keep it warm and to control any bleeding. If the animal is unconscious, check its mouth for any obstructions such as chunks of food and pull the tongue forward. A pencil slid across the back teeth can prevent you being bitten while your fingers are in its mouth. Wrapping the animal in a blanket will prevent it losing body heat, but if no suitable material is available newspapers, kitchen foil, etc may be used instead.

Serious bleeding is more likely to occur inside the cat's body and will therefore be invisible. Paleness in the membranes around its mouth and eyes will show there is a problem. Bleeding from a skin wound should be minimised by applying a pressure pad with a bandage and cotton wool. A tourniquet may help stem the flow of blood from an injured limb or tail. However, unless someone has some training in first aid the injury may be best left alone until the animal arrives at the veterinary surgery.

What exactly is an emergency?

Any accident or injury which threatens the cat's life will constitute an emergency but three possible problems are:

- **Road accidents** - If you see a cat hit by a car and it is still lying in the road the immediate job is to prevent it from being run over again. Despite the risk of causing further damage the cat should be moved to a safe place. But avoid putting yourself at risk - remember that it may be difficult for drivers to see you at night. Approach the cat slowly and deliberately to avoid scaring it even more. Not all

It's an emergency



road accidents are witnessed but if you see a cat which is limping, dishevelled, possibly with oil marks on its fur and damaged claws it may have been in such an accident. It may have suffered severe internal injuries and need urgent veterinary attention.

- **Poisoning** - Sudden attacks of violent vomiting and/or diarrhoea, dribbling from the mouth, staggering and sudden collapse are all possible indications that a cat has been poisoned. If you believe that you know what the cat has eaten, it may help to take the packet, a sample from the plant, etc with you to the vets. If you do not know what caused the problem scrape a sample of vomit or diarrhoea into a jar and take it for tests. Keep the animal warm and quiet until you can get it to a veterinary surgery. Poisoning in cats is not as common as in dogs.
- **Burns and scalds** - The damage caused by fire or hot liquids can be reduced by soaking the wound in plenty of cold, clean water to cool the skin as quickly as possible. Do not attempt to treat the injury with ointments, etc. The animals need to be taken to a vet as quickly as possible as delays can increase the pain and the risks from shock and loss of bodily fluids.

When is it OK to treat an animal myself?

To prevent unnecessary suffering in animals, it was made illegal many years ago for unqualified people to carry out veterinary treatment. Therefore, cat owners can only carry out first aid on their animals to save life or prevent further injury until the patient can be cared for by a vet. However, it is sensible for a caring cat owner to keep a first aid box at hand to deal with minor scratches, etc or to save time in a genuine emergency. This could contain a range of bandages and dressings of different sizes, a blanket, a length of soft cord, scissors and disposable gloves. Unless instructed by your vet it is not advisable to treat wounds with ointments or TCP as cats will often lick off anything applied to the skin and can make themselves ill swallowing distasteful substances.

If you want any other information on health issues concerning your cat please contact your local Village Vet practice and we will be happy to advise you.