

TRILOGY

Recognize the Signs of Shock (Requires Immediate Vet Care)

By Dr. Sarah

Shock

Shock is a life-threatening disease state in animals requiring immediate veterinary attention and treatment. The most common cause of shock in pets is trauma, including injuries due to car accidents, bites and gunshots. Puppies and small dogs can go into shock quickly from fluid loss (due to vomiting and diarrhea) or low blood sugar. Regardless of the cause, it is vitally important to recognize the signs of shock and seek immediate veterinary care.

How to Recognize Shock

Check your pet's heart rate. The heart can be easily felt by putting your hand on your pet's chest just behind the left elbow and counting beats for one minute. An early sign of shock is an elevated heart rate.

Normal heart rate for dogs and cats

Kittens 180-220 beats/minute
Cats 110-130 beats/minute
Puppies 70-120 beats/minute
Dogs 70-120 beats/minute
Small Dogs 70-140 beats/minute

Gum Color

Check the color of your pet's gums by lifting the upper lip and observing the color of the inner lip and gums. Normal coloring of the gums is pink. Dark red, blue, brown, white or yellow colors are abnormal and are indicative of an emergency. This is more difficult on dogs and cats with black pigmentation on their lips and gums.

Check for Dehydration

A pet with vomiting and diarrhea can develop shock and dehydration, and a dehydrated pet needs treatment immediately. To check dehydration, grasp the skin between the shoulder blades and pull up. When you release the skin, it should quickly fall flat. If it takes longer than two seconds, or continues to stick up, this is a sign of dehydration, for which you should seek immediately veterinary care. For older dogs and cats, lifted skin may take a little longer to resume normal shape, about four to five seconds.

As shock progresses, signs become more obvious. Heart rate may be elevated and irregular, but may also be abnormally slow. Gums may turn very pale or blue. The pet will feel cold and will be lethargic or seem depressed.

How to Treat

1. Immediately transport the pet to a veterinary facility.
2. Protect yourself! Apply a muzzle if your pet is in pain or is frightened, as long as she is not vomiting and the muzzle will not interfere with breathing.
3. Stop the flow of bleeding with pressure or wraps. Cover obvious fractures with a towel.
4. Cover the pet with blankets to calm the pet and prevent heat loss.
5. Do not force your pet to eat or drink. Do not pour water into your pet's mouth.
6. Do not hesitate to seek veterinary treatment, even if the pet seems okay after an accident. Early stages of shock are difficult to recognize, and many animals who seem okay at first can deteriorate rapidly. Act quickly, as prompt medical care may mean the difference between life and death.

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