



What to do if your pet is involved in a road traffic accident (RTA)

Overview

- Any pet involved in a road traffic accident (RTA) should be checked by a vet straight away.
- Even if they don't have obvious signs of injury, there could be serious internal injuries that you can't see from the outside.

First aid

- **Stay calm** to reassure your pet and help you make decisions
- **Make sure you are both safe**, could either of you get hurt?
- **Carefully [move your pet to safety](#)** (if necessary)
- **Check for any life threatening problems**, such as [heavy bleeding](#) or [difficulty breathing](#)
- **Check for injuries**, such as [wounds](#) or [broken bones](#)
- **Keep your pet warm**, using blankets or coats
- **Get vet help** – take your pet straight to the nearest vets and call to let them know you are coming

When travelling in a car, cats and small pets should travel in a pet box for their own safety, and dogs should be securely held by a passenger.

Remember, a scared, painful pet may bite out of fear, be careful and use a muzzle or towel if necessary (but never in a pet that is struggling to breathe or has face injuries).

Unsure if your pet has been hit?

If you're unsure whether your pet has been hit by a car or not, check them for:

- Scuffed claws
- Wounds
- Limping/stiffness
- Breathing problems



- Pain (growling, crying, off food, guarding an area of their body)
- Pale gums
- Cold feet and ears

Common injuries after an RTA

- **Head injuries** – which can cause problems such as seizures (fitting) and brain damage.
- **Internal injuries and bleeding** – internal bleeding and organ damage aren't always obvious to begin with. A burst bladder is common in cats that have been involved in a road traffic accident.
- **Ruptured diaphragm** – the diaphragm is a thin muscle that separates the chest from the abdomen (belly). It is often ruptured (burst) during a RTA. Once the diaphragm is ruptured organs and fluid can enter the chest, squash the lungs and cause breathing difficulties.
- **Spinal injuries** – damage to the neck and back are common after an RTA and can cause paralysis.
- **Broken bones** – the legs and pelvis are some of the most common bones to fracture during an RTA.
- **Wounds** – grazes, friction burns, cuts, bruises and degloving wounds.

Treatment

Treatment for your pet will depend on their injuries.

Your vet will treat life-threatening injuries first, for example shock, heavy bleeding and organ damage. Once your pet is stable, they will treat other injuries such as wounds and broken bones. Your pet is likely to be admitted into hospital for tests, pain relief, a fluid drip and any other treatment they need. Surgery may be necessary if your pet has severe wounds, broken bones, internal damage or heavy bleeding.

Outlook

Your pet's recovery could take anything from a few days to many weeks, depending on how serious their injuries are. Minor wounds are likely to heal within a week but more serious wounds can take weeks or longer. Broken bones often take a few weeks to heal and can need lots of special care, such



as strict rest or physiotherapy. Sadly, some pets that are seriously injured in an RTA don't survive, even with vet treatment. Head, spine and chest injuries often cause fatal damage that can't be treated.

Preventing road traffic accidents

For tips on how to keep your pets safe on the roads, read our advice:

- [Road safety for dogs](#)
- [Road safety for cats](#)

Neutering – make sure your pet is neutered. Un-neutered pets (especially cats) are much more likely to roam and attempt to cross busy roads.

Microchipping – microchips don't prevent accidents but make it much easier for you to be reunited with your pet if they are involved in one.

Cost

Treatment after a road traffic accident can cost thousands of pounds. It's important to speak to your vet openly about your finances and the cost of treatment, as well as what you think is right for your pet. Consider [insuring your pet](#) as soon as you get them to ensure you have all the support you need to care for them if they are unlucky enough to be involved in an accident.

Find out whether you are eligible for free or low cost PDSA veterinary treatment by visiting www.pdsa.org.uk/eligibility

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