

Wounds and skin injuries

Overview

Very minor wounds (cuts, grazes, burns, bites and bruises) often heal themselves. More serious wounds should always be seen by a vet.

It's really important to stop your pet licking, biting or scratching any wounds - their tongues are rough and mouths contain bacteria that can cause infections.

Treatment for a wound depends on what's caused it and how serious the damage is.

When to contact your vet

Contact your vet for all types of wound that are more serious than a small graze or cut.

First aid and urgent vet treatment is essential for:

- Bleeding wounds (heavy bleeding or bleeding that doesn't stop after 10 minutes)
- Wounds that contain an object (like glass or a large splinter)
- Burns
- Bite wounds (including snake bites)
- Eye injuries
- Wounds which expose tissues like muscle or bone
- Dirty wounds, or infected wounds

Remember, if your pet has a wound, what you see on the outside might not look serious but there could be damage underneath. If you are in any doubt, contact your vet.

Cuts and grazes

Give first aid and seek veterinary help straight away for anything other than a very minor cut or graze. Pets with serious wounds often need pain relief, antibiotics, bandaging, staples or stitches.

Something in the wound?

- If you can see something in the wound (for example a piece of glass) don't try to remove it. You can apply a temporary bandage over the wound to limit bleeding while you get to the vet. Try to ensure this bandage isn't pressing the object further into the wound (see picture).

Bleeding?

- If your pet has a bleeding wound, apply firm pressure to the area and get them to the vets as soon as possible.

Skin missing?

- Injuries where the skin is pulled away so that flesh or bone underneath are exposed are often caused by trapping or road traffic accidents. It's essential to see your vet straight away for degloving injuries, they are very serious and can be fatal.

Bite wounds

Always take your pet to the vet for a bite wound, no matter how big or small. Bite wounds can look small but the damage may be much worse inside.

Bite wounds become infected very easily because teeth are covered in bacteria.

Snake bites

Snake bites need to be treated as an emergency. Take your pet to the vet immediately if you suspect they have been bitten by a snake.

Burns and scalds

Burns always need to be seen by a vet immediately.

First aid is vital to reduce damage and pain. Burns can be caused by extreme heat but also by extreme cold or chemicals.

Burns get easily infected and damage from burns is often not seen for several days after the injury.

Bruising or crushing

Small bruises will heal on their own. A cold compress can be used as first aid. You can use an ice pack, or even just a bag of frozen vegetables wrapped in a towel, held gently against the area for a few minutes.

Large bruises?

If you can see large bruises on your pet call your vet straight away.

Bruises for no reason? Lots of bruises?

Contact your vet if your pet has lots of bruises or bruises for no apparent reason - this can be a sign of a bleeding problem.

Has your pet been trapped or crushed?

Crush injuries (being trapped under or in something) may not break the skin, but can cause hidden damage. This is a very serious type of injury - seek vet help straight away if your pet has had a crush injury (even if you can't see any wounds).

Abscesses

An abscess is a collection of pus that builds up in a pocket just below the surface of the skin. Abscesses cause a lot of pain and discomfort because they are under high pressure. Always contact your vet if you think your pet has an abscess.

Treatment

Your vet may advise the following treatments:

Bandaging and protection

- It is very important to stop your pet (or any other pets) from licking, biting or scratching at wounds. Their mouths are full of bacteria that can cause infections.
- Scratching or biting can cause serious damage.
- Buster collars, body suits, protective socks or sometimes muzzles can be used.
- Your vet will decide whether a bandage is needed.

Anti-inflammatory pain relief

- Anti-inflammatory pain relief is excellent at reducing inflammation and pain which can help to speed up wound healing.

Antibiotics

- Many wounds heal well without antibiotics but they are sometimes necessary for infected wounds or wounds that are likely to become infected.

Cleaning

- Wounds heal much faster if they are kept clean. Your vet may ask you to clean your pet's wound.

Rest

- If there is a lot of skin movement around a wound it can take longer to heal. Strict rest will sometimes be necessary.

Infection

If a wound is infected you might see the following signs:

- Red, swollen skin around the wound
- Heat coming from the wound
- Pus (white, green or yellow liquid)
- Bleeds easily when touched
- Pain around the wound



Infected wounds should always be examined and treated by a vet. They are likely to need antibiotics, pain relief and sometimes, in severe cases, they may require surgery.

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