

How will you react if the worst should happen?

Emergency responses and information every pet owner should have



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Owning a pet is a wonderful experience and many consider relationships developed with their pets among the most meaningful in their lives. It is also an enormous responsibility. Most pet owners will outlive their pets, which means serious illness and end of life decisions will fall to them at some point. A little considered fact is that these matters are not only difficult for owners to think about, but they are also difficult subjects for veterinarians and staff to bring up with you, their clients.

While difficult medical issues and tough choices can't be avoided, we can prepare ourselves by opening the discussion with our veterinarian and making sure that we have the best information at hand before emergencies present themselves.

This brochure is intended to provide you with quick information necessary in an emergency situation, and to prompt you to take the long view with your pet and ask the right questions now.

If my pet becomes seriously ill at home

1. Contact your vet immediately – they may give you specific instructions and can arrange to see you at the practice or potentially visit your pet at home.

*On the phone to your vet, be as accurate as you can about what has happened so they can give you the best advice.

*Be careful handling your pet as animals in pain may bite and scratch.

If your dog/cat is unconscious: 1. Pull the tongue forwards. 2. Straighten the neck. 3. Look for any obstructions in the back of the mouth. Remove them carefully by hand if you can see anything.

If your dog/cat is not breathing: Gently close the mouth and breath very gently into the nose approximately every 10 seconds.

If there is no heart beat: Gently compress the chest 15 times then give two breaths.

Try to keep your pet warm, quiet and calm.

If your pet is having a fit: Be careful not to get bitten or scratched. Move any furniture away from your pet so it cannot hurt him/herself, turn the lights off and make the room as quiet as possible. Ring your vets for advice immediately.

Important contact numbers: Fill in your personal information below, print and cut along the lines, and post on the refrigerator door or easy to reach location in your home:

1. Primary veterinarian

Clinic name:

Phone number:

2. Emergency/after hours clinic

Clinic name:

Phone number:

3. Pet insurance company

Name:

Phone number:

Important Emergency and End of Life Considerations:

If my pet is found dead at home or if my pet dies in the course of medical treatment

Know your options: Unfortunately times of extreme emotional stress are also often times we are faced with the need to make difficult decisions. It may help if you have considered your options and decided how you feel about them ahead of time. In either event presented above, the first and best person to speak to is a veterinarian; your vet will be able to get you the most factual information in the shortest amount of time as you work through decisions like:

What do I do with my pet's body? When your pet dies, you must choose how to handle its remains, and it can be very difficult to make this decision in the moment. You may change your mind, but if you have considered your feelings about burial, cremation, or leaving the body at the clinic when not under emotional pressure, you will have some thoughts to fall back on when the time comes. You can ask your veterinarian to look into services for you and have your wishes noted in your pet's medical record.

Should I try to find out what happened? Generally this would require having a post-mortem examination conducted, in which case time will be of the essence. If you think this is the type of information you might need, you can talk to your veterinarian ahead of time about the availability of an unbiased professional service. You can be specific about the kind of answers you think you would want, and you can have your specific wishes noted in your pet's medical record. ***Are there ways that my pet's death can contribute to veterinary education?*** While organ donor programs similar to those available in human medicine are generally not available, your pet may be able to provide important information

about animal disease that could contribute to veterinary care in the future. Your veterinarian may not be comfortable initiating conversations with you about these subjects, but would likely be able to discuss options and provide you with information if you make an inquiry.

What can a post-mortem examination tell me? Generally cause of death is the fundamental question being asked, but other pieces of information such as underlying illness, genetic or congenital problems, ruling in or out poisoning, toxicities, or trauma, and certain legal questions may also be important in particular circumstances and can be addressed through this type of exam. The University of Nottingham School of Veterinary Medicine and Science provides a diagnostic post mortem service to the Veterinary profession, information can be found at **Insert Nearest Pathology Service**
<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/vet/servicesfortheveterinaryprofession/pathology.aspx>

Will I still be able to bury my pet's ashes? Yes; the post-mortem examination can be coordinated with a pet cremation service for return of ashes to you for burial.

What may happen next: After the immediate decisions are made in the face of a tragic or emotional event, a period of grieving is normal and should be expected. Most people experience a number of emotions as they move through the grieving process, including depression, anger, denial and guilt. You may find that the loss of a pet brings about a deeper sense of sorrow that you expect, and your friends and family may not understand the depth of emotion you're experiencing. Pay attention to how you are handling your grief. If you find it difficult to discuss your loss with your family and friends, consider sharing with individuals or groups of people who have also lost pets or with a grief counselor. Ask your vet to help you find a local group or recommend a professional to contact.