

How To Make Your Own Pet First Aid Kit

A pet first aid kit is the first step in being prepared should an animal emergency happen to your 4-legged family member. While there are many pre-made kits that may be purchased for pets, building your own kit or adding to a pre-made one may be the best way to create a kit customized for your pet's lifestyle and needs. Keep in mind, just like your first aid kit at home, remember to replenish used items right away and monitor the expiration date of the contents.

How To Organize and Store Things

The container you select to organize your pet's first aid kit should reflect where you are most likely to use it. For example, if you and your dog walk, bike or hike frequently, consider using a fanny pack, backpack or even a doggy backpack as the container. If you travel with your pet, a backpack, small duffel bag or a cosmetics travel case might be more handy. If your pet is a stay-at-home kind of kid, a small plastic storage box may work the best.

What Should It Contain?

Scissors – use for freeing your pet from entanglements. EMT (sometimes called "crash") scissors are recommended, as these are less likely to accidentally cut your pet's skin than traditional household scissors or kitchen shears.

Sterile Eye Wash – use for flushing foreign material out of your pet's eye. Make sure it is a saline eye wash, not contact lens solution.

Tweezers – use to remove splinters, stingers, or other foreign materials from wounds.

Tick Remover Tool – these tools make it easy remove ticks and reduce additional damage to your pet's skin during removal.

Toenail Trimmer and Styptic Pencils or Powder – use for torn or broken toenails. Cornstarch or flour also works for slowing bleeding from a torn, broken or quicked nail. *Styptic pencils/powder, cornstarch or flour should never be used to slow bleeding from any other wounds!*

Tape* - preferably the 1" white medical tape. Easy to tear by hand, holds well and will not tear skin or pull out fur when removing.

Non-Stick Band-aids or Telfa pads* - used to cover open wounds when applying a bandage.

Roll Gauze* - used for bandaging and as padding for splints. *Caution is advised, this product can easily be wrapped too tight and cause damage!* Can also be used to make a temporary muzzle.

Vetrap* - a flexible self-adherent bandage wrap can be used for covering bandages or splints. It clings to itself and will not stick to fur or skin. *Caution is advised, this product can easily be wrapped too tight and cause damage!*

Antiseptic Wash or Wipes – use to cleanse abrasions or minor wounds of the skin. Look for non-stinging preparations such as chlorhexidine or povidone-iodine. Rubbing alcohol and hydrogen peroxide should not be used on wounds.

Antibiotic Ointment** - use for minor skin abrasions. *Never for use in the eyes or ears! Always speak with your veterinarian first about proper use for your pet, and as with any medication, use only at the direction of your veterinarian.*

Latex or Plastic Exam Gloves - use when the situation gets messy.

Muzzle, Roll Gauze or Shoelace – use to make a muzzle. Even the most friendly or well-trained animals may bite when injured or frightened. *Muzzles should NEVER be used if your pet is nauseous or vomiting!*

Towels and/or Blanket - use for keeping warm and if necessary, can be used as way to transport an injured pet (by using as a sling) or to prevent a bite when lifting and carrying an injured pet (by using to cover the face/head).

Digital Thermometer and Petroleum Jelly – use to monitor your pet's body temperature. Normal body temperature for dogs and cats is roughly between 100.0°F to 102.5°F.

Dawn Dish Soap – use to bathe your pet if exposed to certain chemicals or products. Many oil-based chemicals and products such as topical flea/tick preventatives are waterproof and cannot be removed from your pet's coat with traditional pet shampoo. A pet-safe, grease-cutting dish soap is often the safest and most effective way to remove these agents.

Diphenhydramine (Benadryl)** - use for minor allergic reactions. *Always speak with your veterinarian first about proper dosing for your pet, and as with any medication, use only at the direction of your veterinarian.*

Hydrogen Peroxide (3%)** - use for emesis induction; 1mL per 10# body weight, maximum 45mL; can be repeated once in 10-15 minutes if no emesis with first dose. Never use other emesis alternatives such as salt, gagging, oil or Ipecac! *Always speak with your veterinarian first about proper dosing for your pet and IF emesis is recommended for the chemical or product ingested, and as with any medication, use only at the direction of your veterinarian. **NOT TO BE USED IN CATS!***

A List of Current Phone Numbers – this list should include numbers for your family's veterinarian, the closest emergency veterinary facility, animal control (or non-emergency police dispatch), and animal poison control.

A Copy of Your Pet's Current Medical Record and List of Current Medications – take this with you when seeking emergency medical care for your pet. It is important to provide current medical history to your veterinarian or an emergency veterinarian during your pet's emergency. The best way to do this is to have a copy of your pet's medical history and list of current medications on-hand.

**Bandages or splints placed on your pet at home or at the scene of an injury/accident should be considered temporary and never left on for an extended period of time. Inappropriately applied bandages and splints can cause more harm than good and ultimately can result in the loss of a limb or a life-threatening infection. If you are unsure how to apply a bandage appropriately or lack appropriate materials to do so, it is best to seek immediate medical attention and have one correctly applied.*

Consult your veterinarian about appropriate medications that should be included in your pet's first aid kit and the proper dosing for your pet's weight and current health status. Some human OTC (over-the-counter) medications are toxic, even fatal to pets or may interfere with more appropriate medications your veterinarian may wish to administer. **NEVER give any over-the-counter, previously prescribed medication or human prescription medications without consulting a veterinarian first.

Customizing A First Aid Kit for Your Pet

Different species, age groups, and pet lifestyles have different first aid kit needs. For example, a ferret or diabetic pet kit should include honey or Karo syrup in the event of a low blood sugar episode. Pets who take medications regularly should have a couple days supply of all current medications (be sure to rotate meds to ensure they do not expire). Your veterinarian can help you customize a first aid kit to meet your pet's specific medical needs.

Building a First Aid Kit Isn't Enough

Purchasing or building a kit is a great first step, but won't be a lot of help in the event of an emergency if you are not familiar with how and when to use the items. Taking a pet first aid class from the American Red Cross is the next step in ensuring you know how to best help your pet should the need arise.