

Bright Eyes & Bushy Tails
Quarterly Newsletter
September 1, 1999

Hi all! I can't believe that it's already September 1. This newsletter should have been mailed out in late August, but I've been so busy with sick animals (both my own and the practice) that I just didn't get around to it on time. This month I'm going to write briefly about CPR in pets. My mother requested this, and for once I'm listening to her. Won't she be surprised?! Also, below is a brief discussion of rabies that I postponed from last quarter.

CPR

This talk below about CPR is a bit of a teaser. The local American Red Cross Chapter is starting to hold Pet First Aid Classes (which include CPR). There are five class dates for this year, with some in Cedar Rapids and some in Iowa City. Please call the American Red Cross at 319-337-2119 to find out more information! (Also, everyone should know "human" CPR.) For the Pet First Aid, the Red Cross is mostly concentrating on dogs and cats. I volunteered to talk at several of the sessions about "exotic" pet first aid and CPR, and I'm still waiting to hear back regarding whether there's sufficient interest.

Before I begin, I would like to stress the following statement: **DON'T GET BIT OR HURT YOURSELF!** You may have the sweetest, most loving animal in the world (second sweetest--I have the first), but when animals are in extreme pain or are very scared their instincts tell them to protect themselves. If you touch an injury that hurts, their first reaction is to make the pain stop. If you happen to be the one causing further pain, even if you're trying to help, your pet may bite you. Physical support for injuries can go a long way towards decreasing the pain. For example, a small pet with a broken leg will be much more comfortable if placed in a box before moving to examine him or her. A larger pet might use a stretcher.

Animal CPR is very similar to Human CPR, so most of you will already be familiar with the **ABCs**.

A-Airway.

Check the airway-are the mouth and throat clear? Some potential times pets have airway obstructions are during seizures (a dog's tongue can get in the way or some vomited food), as a result of trauma (being hit by a car, a small pet being stepping on), or from choking (usually caused by trying to eat a toy).

To check for a patent the airway:

- 1) Position the animal on its side (of course if you have a bearded dragon or other animal with a similar "dorso-ventrally flattened" shape, just lay it on its belly).
- 2) Gently tilt the head back slightly-support the neck while you do this, so you don't over extend the neck.
- 3) Pull the tongue out the front of the mouth .
- 4) Look in the mouth, if you see something grab it. In larger dogs, you can do a finger sweep to check to make sure, but in smaller mammals, birds, and reptiles I don't recommend doing a finger sweep because you may end up lodging something in the back of the mouth. (Like I said, this is very similar to human CPR-in adults you do a finger sweep, in infants you don't.)

B-Breathing.

Now that you have opened the airway, is the animal breathing? **Look, Listen, and Feel.**

Look. Is the chest rising and falling. **Listen.** Put your ear near the pet's mouth, and listen for breath sounds. **Feel.** Put your hand (or finger) lightly on the animal's chest. Checking for breathing isn't as easy as you might think, especially in some reptile species since they often hold their breath when scared. Be sure to check for at least 10 seconds.

After you determined that the animal isn't breathing, you can start rescue breathing:

- 1) For medium and large dogs hold their mouth closed with your hands (for smaller animals you won't need to do this since your mouth will seal the mouth and lips).
- 2) Place your mouth over the animal's nose.
- 3) Before you exhale take a split second to think about how much you'll need to exhale to inflate the lungs of the animal you're working on. A Canary requires a miniscule amount of air, while a Great Dane will have lungs the size of ours. Remember how in human CPR, a baby only takes a puff? Well, for many of our reptiles, birds, and pocket pets a puff is actually going to be too much.
- 4) As you exhale into the animal's nose, watch for the chest to rise. You want it to inflate to a "normal" distance without inflating too much. You can actually do damage if you over inflate the lungs.
- 5) For most pets 20-30 breaths per minute is adequate. Birds and pocket pets tend to breathe faster than this, and big dogs slower, but this rate will be sufficient to supply adequate oxygenation to the animal.

C-Circulation.

After checking for breathing and starting rescue breathing, you need to check for a pulse. For most of this, you can lay them on their right side, while you face their chest. Usually the easiest way to feel for a pulse is to place your hands on the chest wall of the animal where their elbow hits (mammals, with the exception of ferrets, who's heart is located a little bit further towards the tail). For any largish pets, the hope is that you'll be able to feel the chest wall move with a heartbeat. This can be tough for reptiles, so you may even want to purchase a cheap stethoscope for this purpose¹.

It can be extremely difficult to feel or even hear a weak beat. I recommend getting used to feeling for pulses and listening to your pet's heartbeat while they are healthy, so you will be able to do it in an emergency situation. Detecting heartbeats in overweight dogs and cats can also be a challenge.

To do chest compressions:

Cats and small dogs:

With the animal lying on its right side, use the palm of one hand at the point where the elbow touches the chest, and compress the chest one-half to 1 inch. If you are by yourself, you should be doing five chest compressions and one breath, then checking for a pulse. Keep repeating this cycle.

¹ Actually, having a cheap stethoscope on hand isn't a bad idea for everyone--we've used them for everything from their intended use, to locating a cat trapped in the ducts to a furnace system, to tracing plumbing pipes.

Medium to Large Dogs:

Same protocol as cats, but you will depress the chest wall 1 to 3 inches.

Giant Dogs (over 90 pounds)

If you are by yourself, do 10 compressions for each breath, then check for a pulse. Repeat compressions and breaths as necessary.

Pocket pets, reptiles, and birds:

Administer chest compressions with your fingertip (use one or two fingers depending on the size of the animal). I would do five compressions to one breath. These should be fast little compressions (1,2,3,4,5), unlike a big dog where the compressions would be 1 & 2 & 3... Be very careful not to compress too far. A cat only needs one-half to 1 inch chest compression, so an African Grey or a Hamster will only need a small fraction of that. Always remember to keep rechecking for a pulse.

During all of this, don't forget to get help! These pets need emergency treatment. I encourage all of you to take the First Aid course. If anyone would like, I can talk a little about pet first aid in the next newsletter.

Rabies

This past spring, I got a call about a bat that couldn't fly. The caller was obviously comfortable handling the bat, and I'm so used to dealing with pocket pets that I just assumed this was a pet. After a few questions, however, it turned out that the bat was sick two days ago when the caller first found it in her back yard. In the context of both this Good Samaritan, and animal first aid and CPR discussion above, this is a good time to warn people about contact with injured wildlife.

Rabies isn't extremely common, but it's out there. Any mammal can get (and transmit) rabies, but birds and reptiles don't seem to be able to get it. Although most wild animals don't have rabies, the scary thing is that once a person or animal gets rabies, it's almost uniformly fatal. There is no treatment and there is no cure.

The only way to control rabies is to prevent it by vaccination. **If a wild animal or a feral cat bits your pet, call us to administer a booster shot for his or her rabies vaccine. If a wild animal bites or scratches you, call the County Health Department.** If you can safely capture or contain the animal that did the biting, that will help. But the most important thing you can do is seek medical attention. **DO NOT** wait to see if you get sick. Rapid vaccination can prevent rabies, but if you wait it may be too late.

People and animals who might be exposed to rabies can get a "pre-exposure" vaccination. This is what dogs, cats, ferrets, Allan, and I get every one to three years. These shots are relatively simple and inexpensive. If a wild animal bites you, you'll get a "post-exposure" vaccine. Although the "post-exposure" shots are more involved, the days of getting the shots in your stomach are gone--if you think you might have been exposed to rabies, don't be afraid to seek help!

Sincerely yours,

Jennifer L. Berger, DVM

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