



## **Roadside First Aid for Cats**

Unfortunately, road traffic accidents (RTAs) involving cats are common. They misjudge the distance and speed of oncoming vehicles and can be blinded by headlights. However, cats are tough animals and with PetPlan figures showing 25% of incidents are fatal, good first aid and prompt veterinary treatment will see many cats survive and make good recoveries. The best chance they have depends on how soon they get seen by a vet first of all, but how effective first aid by the roadside is could significantly increase their chances and be the difference between life and death. Please note, the guidance in this section is designed for emergency treatment only in order to stabilise a cat and increase their chances of survival. In all cases, cats should be taken to a

veterinarian as soon as possible - even if the cat appears to be perfectly fine!



### **Assess the situation/avoid further injury**

Check for oncoming traffic and, if possible, carefully try to stop traffic or motion cars to go around. If you can, get someone to phone the nearest vet. It is unlikely they will come to collect the cat, but they can prepare the surgery ready for the emergency and offer further advise on the phone. Always try to approach the cat from the front so they can see you and avoid any sudden

movements. Speak in gentle tones to reassure them. Ideally you need to get the cat, and yourself, out of further harm's way so if you are able to get them safely far back from the road you should do that.

Do not move or bend them any more than necessary. Using a board underneath the cat and gently sliding them onto it is a good way to avoid causing more damage. If you have another person helping, you can use a jacket or towel held taught to act as a stretcher. If you have no means of creating a make-shift stretcher, lift them with one hand under their hind legs and the other around their chest. It is important to keep their body level so as not to cause further injury. Cats may also rupture their diaphragm and lifting the cat carelessly can cause the body organs to press on the weakened or torn tissue.

Once off the road, place the cat on a flat hard surface.

## **Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)**

CPR does not usually bring a cat back, but what CPR does is buys time for the vet to find and treat the injuries. You can buy the cat that valuable time whilst performing CPR at the roadside and/or on the way to the vets.

If the cat stops breathing, open their airway by gently grasping the tongue and pulling it forward out of the mouth until it is flat. Perform rescue breathing by closing the cat's mouth, hold it closed with your hand, and breath with your mouth directly into their nose until you see the cats chest expand. Once the chest expands, continue the rescue breathing once every 4 or 5 seconds.

Do not begin chest compressions until you've secured an airway and started rescue breathing.

To begin chest compressions, gently lay the cat on their right side on a firm surface. The heart is located in the lower half of the chest on the left side. Place one hand underneath the cat's chest for support and place the other hand over the heart. To massage the hearts, cradle your hand around the cat's chest so your thumb is on the left

side of the chest and your fingers are on the right side of the chest, and compress the chest by squeezing it between your thumb and fingers. Press down 100-150 times per minute.

Don't perform rescue breathing and chest compressions at the same exact time, alternate the chest compressions with the rescue breaths, or work as a team with another person so one person performs chest compressions for 4-5 seconds and stops long enough to allow the other person to give one rescue breath.



**Shock**

Shock is common after serious injury or major fright. Shock occurs when the brain is deprived of oxygen, which will result in the circulatory system slowing down.

The symptoms can be a weak and/or rapid pulse, pale gums, hypothermia, shallow breathing, nervousness and dazed eyes. Generally, they will be lethargic, disorientated and losing/lost consciousness. Seizures can occur also (see seizures below)

There are 3 types of shock in cats;

1) Hypovolemic which is where shock occurs due to a significant loss of blood or fluid (see external bleeding below)

2) Cardiogenic which is when the heart has failed, and cardiogenic shock occurs (see CPR above)

3) Distributive which is associated with infections, problems within peripheral blood vessels and central circulatory system problems (see internal bleeding below).

The cat will need to see a veterinarian straight away as shock is life threatening if not treated in

time. How you can help roadside is by keeping the cat warm and calm whilst they reach a vet. Wrap them in a blanket, towel, coat, or equivalent, but avoid direct heat such as that from heat pads/water bottles as this can worsen their condition.

You should avoid direct heat with any unconscious or injured animal as they are unable to move themselves if uncomfortable, heightening burn risks.

Do not attempt to feed or water an animal in shock and remain as calm as possible so as not to stress the cat further.

Remember, even the nicest natured cats may bite or scratch if in severe pain and shock, but this is simply a reaction born out of fear. Wrapping them in a towel, coat, or similar, will reduce injury to yourself and further injury to the cat.

We only ever advise on 'scruffing' in extreme situations whereby you not having control of the situation will cause further suffering to the cat. Only ever scruff the cat if there is a danger of them running off either in to traffic again, or



generally running off so as you can't transport them to a vet.

## **Seizures**

Seizures can be extremely distressing for rescuers to witness, and usually start by the cat collapsing onto the ground, going stiff, and then going into convulsions - uncontrolled muscle contractions.

This may make the cat look like they are jerking their body, paddling feet, snapping jaw, and similar movements. It's possible they may even empty their bowels and bladder during the seizure. Although extremely distressing, you must try to remain calm.

Seizures can last around 2-3 minutes and, during this time, you must keep the cat away from any objects that might hurt them. It is not advised to try to restrain them during a seizure.

When the seizure stops, the cat will be disoriented and may be fearful. This could result in the cat attacking you or running away so as



they begin to come around, be prepared to restrain them.

Keep them as warm and calm as possible and get them to a veterinarian straight away. If the seizure doesn't stop, or they are having cluster seizures, the veterinarian can give them treatment to stop the seizures.

### **Asses injuries - fractures and breaks**

Ideally the cat will need to see a veterinarian straight away regardless, but a quick roadside assessment may result in the cat being bought more time and potentially be saved.

Only life-threatening conditions should be dealt with roadside as they may not have enough time for you to get them to a vet. Life-threatening conditions include failure to breathe or a stopped heart, severe bleeding, head trauma, or broken bones in the body such as ribs, spine or pelvis.

You won't be able to treat all life threatening injuries roadside, but following the advise in this article you can attempt some.

Cuts, grazes or broken limbs are less urgent at this point, and a veterinarian will handle these once at the surgery.

Fractures will be determined by a veterinarian, but if you do suspect the cat has a fracture you are advised to let the vet carry out treatment. This is not life threatening and, although you can attempt to set the fracture with a homemade splint, remember that a badly placed splint may cause more harm than good so it is advised to leave the fracture to the professionals. However, should you suspect a fracture, or break, you can act to minimize the damage and pain the cat is in.

Gently lay the cat on a flat surface for support. While transporting them to a veterinarian, use a stretcher (you can use a board or other firm surface as a stretcher, or use a throw rug or blanket as a sling). If possible, secure the pet to the stretcher but make sure you don't put pressure on the injured area or the animal's chest whilst in transport.

## **Internal and external bleeding**

Even if a cat that has been hit by a car does not appear to be badly injured, they still need to be examined by a vet. There is a risk that the cat maybe haemorrhaging internally, and they will die if this is not detected and dealt with. There is nothing you can do roadside for internal bleeding, and very little veterinarians themselves can do as a quick fix. Cats will need emergency treatment while vets attempt to take control of the bleed.

Internal bleeding tends to be one of the biggest killers of cats following a RTA as they either never got veterinary help fast enough, or the clock ran out on vets attempting to stabilise them.

Symptoms the cat is suffering internal bleeding are bleeding from nose, mouth, rectum, coughing or vomiting up blood, blood in urine, pale gums, collapsed, weak and rapid pulse where the pulse rate is too easy to find.

Keep the cat as warm and calm as possible and transport immediately to a veterinarian following the advice above regarding keeping the body as

level as possible and being mindful they risk going in to shock.

Cuts and grazes are not to be worried about at this stage. However, significant blood loss can become life threatening fast and you are able to take control by the roadside to stop the bleed.

Arterial bleeds can be recognised by bright red blood and spurting motion and are the highest priority.

Stop bleeding by applying firm pressure over the wound. Press a clean, thick gauze pad over the wound, and keep pressure over the wound with your hand until the blood starts clotting. This will often take several minutes for the clot to be strong enough to stop the bleeding.

Instead of checking it every few seconds to see if it has clotted, hold pressure on it for a minimum of 3 minutes and then check it. If bleeding is severe and on the legs, apply a tourniquet (using an elastic/hair band or gauze) between the wound and the body, and apply a bandage and pressure over the wound. Loosen the tourniquet for 20 seconds every 15-20 minutes.

Severe bleeding can quickly become life-threatening so the cat will need to see a veterinarian immediately even once you have stabilised it.



## **Be prepared**

Anyone can give roadside first aid. Following just a few simple instructions, any driver can help save a cat's life. Anyone can have the equipment to hand also. Our cat first aid kit ensures that you have the tools necessary, and it will take hardly any space up in your car meaning you can always keep it handy - just in case!

This pack includes all of the items that you should expect to adequately handle injuries prior to seeking professional veterinary treatment including a foil blanket to retain body warmth and help combat shock, conforming bandages to use if a sprain is suspected, bandages to stop bleeding and dress wounds including microporous tape if additional retention is needed, and so much more.

The tools in this kit are also adequate to be used on all animals, and could also be handy to have around the home.