

CANINE COMMON SENSE WOUND CARE

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A day in the field with your canine companion can be a thrilling adventure for you both. The leap of a retriever into an icy stream, the flush of a grouse in an aspen thicket, the exhilarating run through the agility course or a simple romp for pleasure around the dog park are the good times we live for.

These wonderful adventures can also be wrought with potential hazards. A puncture from a nail, thorn or another dog's teeth, a laceration or abrasion from an exposed broken tree limb, a brush with an ATV or any number of other wound causing incidents may occur. Initial management of traumatic wounds should always be based on a common sense approach and a bit of training. Having a good basic first aid kit on hand is important to help treat these wounds while on your outing. (See sidebar.)

If your dog is wounded, the first steps you should take include control of the bleeding and prevention of contamination. Wounds can be very painful so dogs often must be restrained for even minimal treatment. Almost all bleeding can be stopped by applying direct pressure to the site for a minimum of 3-5 minutes. Tourniquets should only be used as a last resort for arterial bleeding that can not be controlled with direct pressure. An example of an extreme emergency that may require a tourniquet would be with the loss of a limb. If a tourniquet must be used, place the tourniquet between the heart and the wound and release the tension periodically.

One thing to remember is that all wounds are considered contaminated, but the degree of contamination and subsequent infection can be minimized. First, use sterile or clean materials to control the bleeding. Then use a dilute surgical scrub solution to clean around the wound. If hydrogen peroxide is used, only use it once, for hydrogen peroxide can be toxic to healthy tissue cells. Water is actually one of the best wound cleaners and hydrotherapy will help irrigate and debride the exposed tissue. Flush with water, ideally under pressure, until the exposed wound tissue is glistening and free of debris. Professional veterinary advice should always be sought to determine if the wound should be closed or allowed to heal as an open wound. Sometimes the wound may even require closure sometime later after most of the healing process has occurred.

Puncture wounds, especially those caused by teeth, should have the opening enlarged if possible using a pair of scissors or hemostats. These enlarged openings should be irrigated thoroughly as described above. These wounds are rarely sutured and are kept open to allow for drainage and the healing process to proceed from the inside to the outside. Unless they can be very easily removed, foreign bodies or objects associated with punctures should be left alone until professional treatment is received. Attempting to remove the object yourself can actually cause more harm to your dog.

Bandages on wounds should be used very carefully if at all and professional advice should always be sought for long term bandages. Oral antibiotics and medication for pain and inflammation can be helpful but should only be used with veterinary help. The use of topical medications is rarely curative and in some cases can even delay the healing process. Your dog will often want to lick the wound. Licking will not hurt the healing unless it is excessive and, if

you have applied topical medications, the dog will lick these off and absorb them into their system.

When transporting your dog for veterinary care remember to call ahead, do not feed your dog as he may require anesthesia and surgery, and be sure to provide an accurate history to the Veterinarian so that other potential physiological problems can be addressed.

Overall, superficial soft tissue wounds and punctures are rarely considered life-threatening emergencies and by using common sense you can provide effective wound care for your dog. Carrying a first aid kit on each and every outing will not only help you take care of those nicks and cuts while out in the field but may even save your dog's life. Serious wounds and follow-up care should always be referred to your Veterinarian for appropriate therapeutics and treatment.

(Sidebar)

Basic First Aid Kit

Sterile gauze pads—large and small
Hemostats
Scissors
Forceps
Surgical scrub solution
Bottled Water
Small towels
Cotton tipped applications
Assorted bandages and/or flexible wrap
Eye cleaner or wash solution
Thermometer
Buffered aspirin
Benadryl
Hydrocortisone ointment
Cold pack
Syringe
Saline solution
Gloves
Adhesive tape