

All About Pets

The national pet care information service

CARING FOR YOUR SICK DOG



THE BLUE CROSS

Britain's pet charity

The following information is intended only as a general guideline for the care of a dog already under veterinary treatment. If your dog is ill, you should always contact your vet first.



Vomiting and diarrhoea

These are common minor problems and they can follow changes of diet, scavenging and feeding on left-over food.

Changing to new food should be done gradually. Take at least three days and start by adding small amounts of the new diet to the current one. Avoid giving “left-overs” – this can trigger serious problems, such as pancreatitis (inflamed digestive gland).

Try to prevent your dog from scavenging by keeping your rubbish secure and, if necessary, by using a muzzle when your dog is in the park. Bones should never be given. Bowel irritation from chewed up bone fragments can cause gastrointestinal upsets and blockages.

Vomiting usually means a tummy upset but it can also be a sign of other illnesses. If your dog has been vomiting frequently or seems weak and lethargic, always contact your vet. For adult pets that remain bright and keen to eat, you can follow the advice below. However, if vomiting persists for more than a day or if your dog seems unwell, contact the vet.

Do not let your dog drink too much at once. Drinking lots of water tends to result in further vomiting with the risk of dehydration. Give cooled, boiled water little and often.

Do not feed until at least 12 hours after the last episode, then offer small amounts of a white meat diet such as boiled chicken or boiled fish (cod or coley), with white rice. Provided there is no further vomiting, offer small amounts every two hours for the first day and then larger quantities less often for the next couple of days. If all remains well, start to mix in the usual diet.

Diarrhoea – do not feed for 12 hours, but allow access to water, then feed a bland diet as described above for vomiting. If diarrhoea persists for more than one to two days (depending on the severity), your vet should be consulted.

Important – always consult your vet if you have a puppy with vomiting or diarrhoea.

Invalids

Many elderly dogs develop longstanding conditions, which, at times, may need home nursing. Monitor carefully and, if the bad times are beginning to outweigh the good, consider the options carefully. Discuss with your vet or contact our Pet Bereavement Support Service (*see the All About Pets leaflet, Euthanasia (D5)*). Always notify the vet of any changes in the condition of a pet with a longstanding illness.



Think ahead – have enough medication for holidays and weekends and ask the vet if you do not understand the instructions. “Give twice a day,” means (roughly) 12 hours apart! If you stop any medication or if there are problems, tell the vet right away. Suddenly stopping medication can be dangerous so check with your vet.

Do not expect too much of invalids – changes can be stressful for them. Generally, they are less capable of exercise than healthy dogs. If they have friends (human or animal) to visit, do not allow them to overdo things!

It is particularly important for elderly animals to have access to water, so if your pet is having difficulty walking or standing, ensure that the water bowl is positioned for easy access.

If your pet is not eating, do not leave uneaten food around. Pick it up and offer a small quantity of something different later. Appealing foods include fresh chicken and gravy, ham, pilchards and cat food. Or you can get appetising invalid foods from the vet. Try serving food warm or adding garlic.

Give any animal that is lying down a lot, thick bedding in a warm place. If you provide a heater pad, always cover it to prevent burns. Turn animals that cannot move every two hours. Animals on a heater pad should be turned more often and checked frequently for overheating. If your pet is unable to move for more than 24 hours, discuss the long-term outlook and future quality of life with your vet.

Dogs that cannot stand should be taken out to relieve themselves regularly. You may need to support them – pass a towel or blanket from one side to the other under the tummy and hold both ends over the back like a sling. Check the bottom and belly carefully for soiling from faeces or urine, which can be washed off using a baby shampoo. Rinse and dry – beware of burning if using a hairdryer. Use the lowest setting and do not hold it too close. It may be easier to clip longhaired dogs, but mind you do not cut the skin. Areas of hairless skin can be protected from irritation by urine with a layer of Vaseline.

Try to groom your invalid pet daily as it cheers them up.

For further information, see the All About Pets leaflet, Caring for the Older Dog (D4).

Arthritis

Pets with arthritis need a soft bed and assistance up and downstairs. Massaging muscles at the start of the day may be helpful. Rest your pet if they're having a bad day. Only allow your dog outside for a few minutes to go to the toilet. Consider getting a heater pad for use in the winter. Never give your pet human painkillers or arthritis medication – some are dangerous for dogs. Only use medicines prescribed by your vet. "Alternative" health products are unlikely to help alone and you should discuss the use of these with your vet.

Sore skins

Licking is not good for wounds or sores – it just makes them worse. Prevent licking by using a buster or Elizabethan collar. Prevent scratching by putting socks on the feet, or if the itchy area is on the body, by putting a T-shirt on the dog. Bathing in cool salt water (a teaspoon of salt to a pint of water) or applying an ice pack, witch hazel or camomile lotion may soothe until you can get to the vet. Remember that the most effective flea control products come from the vet.



Giving medicines

Preparation is everything. Get everything you need quietly beforehand so you do not end up chasing your dog around the house. It is helpful to have someone to hold the front legs to prevent your dog pawing your hand while you are giving treatments. Small dogs can be wrapped in a towel. Have your pet sitting, preferably with his bottom tucked into a corner of the room (then he cannot keep backing away).



Tablets

It is easiest to hide the tablet in food, although check that the medication doesn't need to be given on an empty stomach. Choose something strong tasting, which will stick to the tablet without falling off – such as cheese, pâté, or cat food. Put the tablet in a small quantity of food and make sure your pet is hungry at medicine time. You can buy soft treats into which you can press a tablet, called tab pockets. Ask at your vet's. It sometimes helps to fool your dog if you give one or two treats – without the tablet of course – before and after. But vary the number, or your dog may learn that the second treat is always "booby trapped".

If you are right handed:

- take the muzzle gently with your left hand. Have your hand on top of the muzzle, with fingers on one side and thumb on the other.
- draw the head back until the nose points at the ceiling. Push on the lips just behind the big fang-like teeth (the canines) and the mouth should open.
- hold the tablet between your first finger and thumb of your right hand. Push down on the lower jaw between the canine teeth with the other fingers of this hand to fully open the mouth, and put the pill as far back on the tongue as you can. Keep hold of the upper jaw throughout so that the mouth cannot close.
- then hold the mouth closed and stroke the throat or rub the nose to encourage swallowing. Do not release until after swallowing, then praise and give a treat.



Eye drops and ointments

- Bathe any discharge from the eye. If you are right handed, use the finger and thumb of your left hand to hold the eyelids open. Animals have strong eyelid muscles so you will need to be firm.
- Hold the medication in your right hand, and bring it towards the eye from the side
- If you are putting in drops, then put one drop right into the eye, being careful not to touch the eye itself
- With an ointment, squeeze a little out of the nozzle to start with, position over the eye, and squeeze again to lay a trail of ointment over the actual surface of the eye. Be careful not to touch the eye with the nozzle.
- Do not let your pet rub the eye (use an Elizabethan collar if necessary) – but do give a treat!



Ear medication

The earflap is only part of your dog's ear. The hearing apparatus is inside the head, at the end of an L-shaped tube (the "ear canal"), which connects it to the outside. This tube starts at the base of the flap where it attaches to the head, runs vertically down the side of the head, and then turns sharply inwards.

When cleaning the ears or applying medication:

- have the cotton wool or tissue and the medication ready with the lid off
- lift the earflap with your left hand if you are right handed and find the opening of the ear canal
- with your right hand put the quantity directed on the label into this opening. Put down the bottle but keep hold of the flap.
- feel for the ear tube running down the side of the head and use your finger and thumb to gently massage the medication down the tube. Wipe away any wax or excess medication that emerges.
- release the earflap – your pet will shake his head
- remember to give a reward!



All About Pets

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All About Pets provides expert advice, information and support for pet owners. It aims to ensure the welfare of Britain's pets by promoting responsible animal care. For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit www.allaboutpets.org.uk. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is a service of The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity, which provides practical support, information and advice for pet and horse owners. Through our network of animal adoption centres we rehome thousands of animals each year. Our hospitals provide veterinary care for the pets of people who cannot afford private vets' fees.

How you can help

The Blue Cross is a registered charity and receives no government funding. We rely entirely on the generosity of pet lovers to help support All About Pets and other vital animal welfare projects. Any contribution would be most welcome. For more information on how you can help call us on 01993 822651 or visit our website at www.bluecross.org.uk.



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All About Pets, The Blue Cross
FREEPOST NAT4336, BURFORD OX18 4BR
www.allaboutpets.org.uk

Registered charity no: 224392