



Useful complementary first aid tools

By **Liza Schneider***

AN ASTUTE animal carer knows when their animal's health is compromised.

They will often be able to associate an earlier event with this insight – for example, the dog that has eaten a rotting carcass and is off its food and vomiting, or the cat that was heard in a fight during the night and is now limping.

A good working knowledge of what signs to look for to determine if your animal's health is at risk is very helpful.

By observing your animal's vital signs (breathing rate and depth, colour of mucous membranes, heart rate and temperature) regularly when it is healthy will help you to detect any abnormality.

Subtle signs of illness might include a quiet or depressed demeanor, poor appetite, heavy eyes and a dull coat. Other more obvious indications of disease include rapid or difficult breathing, elevated or depressed pulse or heart rate, collapse, pale or bright red colour of the gums, difficulty walking or severe lameness, yelping in pain, sudden bloating of the abdomen, severe vomiting and diarrhoea as well as blood loss.

Some of these signs and symptoms are fleeting and pass quickly while others persist and might indicate a serious underlying problem.

Always seek veterinary advice especially if your animal isn't responsive, isn't settling or its condition is getting worse. A number of basic diagnostic tools will help you and your vet or vet nurse to assess how urgent veterinary input is.

Heavy or rapid breathing are important indicators of pain or distress. If the animal's gums are blue or purple with abnormal



breathing, it isn't getting enough oxygen and is likely to have damage to the respiratory system.

If it's having difficulty inhaling, the problem is probably in the upper airway, but if it is having difficulty exhaling then the lower airway is likely to be diseased or damaged. Pale gum colour might indicate shock or anaemia. Red gums will indicate severe congestion or septicaemia.

A very valuable tool to indicate good circulation and hydration status is called the capillary refill time (CRT). Identify a part of the gum which is pink, ideally above the canine teeth. Use a thumb to press it briefly with some light pressure. It will momentarily turn white and should turn pink again within two seconds. If this time is delayed beyond this then there is likely to be a serious problem.

An animal's core temperature is another valuable tool used to assess its status.

A low temperature indicates poor circulation while a slightly high temperature may be an indicator of pain. A severely

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elevated temperature is likely to indicate major infection.

The heart rate is influenced by most of these factors and will be elevated with high temperature, rapid breathing and pain or stress. A persistently elevated or depressed heart rate with none of the above influences needs further investigation.

For animals that aren't showing serious signs that need veterinary attention or for those that are on their way to the vet and could benefit from interim treatment, having a complementary therapy first aid kit to help your animal in times of need can be very helpful.

To assist animals with a rapid recovery from ailments such as skin complaints, tummy upsets, general stress and trauma, my preference is to have user-friendly, safe and effective tools on hand to complement conventional therapies.

- Emergency Essence (Australian Bush Flower Essences) or Rescue Remedy (Bach Flower Essences): a couple of drops may be applied to the inside of the lip every five minutes until the animal is stable or settled. Tagiwig Drama Queen and Save Me, Flex Eez and Spring are great options.
- A general all-round remedy to promote healing: these are often homeopathic complex remedies which include components such as arnica (for bruising), hypericum (for nerve injury), aconite (for shock). Try Tagiwig Pet Mend, or Traumeel, a low-dose remedy with powerful inflammatory modulating effects that assist hugely in bringing down swelling, stopping bruising, relieving pain and speeding up healing generally.
- Vitamin C: a remarkable and safe all-rounder helping to combat infection and assist wound healing often with dramatic results. It is a very useful support in cases of poisoning where it assists detoxification. Use 250mg per 5kg animal weight twice a day.
- Homeopathic/herbal immune support: Tagiwig Immune Tonic or Heel's Echinacea compositum are excellent to boost the immune system and help to prevent infectious disease from developing and progressing.
- Tummy upset aid: Tagiwig Stomach Tonic, Heel's Nux Vomica Homaccord, Vomitusheel, Biopet Digestion or Diarheel are very useful to assist with digestive upsets.
- Slippery Elm powder is a particularly helpful internal poultice to help soothe and heal the inflamed gastrointestinal lining. In cases of diarrhoea use 20-40mg of dried slippery elm per kg of body weight three times a day mixed in water or food. Alternatively mix a teaspoon of powder in a cup of water and give kittens ¼ teaspoon, cats and small dogs one teaspoon, medium dogs 30-60ml and large dogs 90-120ml three times daily.

Rashes and skin issues:

- Aloe vera gel is very soothing for skin rashes and fantastic to help stop hot spots from progressing.
- Calendula used topically is very effective at aiding the healing of skin and is also very useful to help stop bleeding.
- Manuka honey helps to provide the ideal environment to aid in wound healing and may be applied as a poultice.
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