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Pet CPR

It's not a scenario you want to imagine: finding your dog unconscious on your living room floor or your cat hit by a car. Finding your pet not breathing or with his heart not beating can be a terrifying experience, but there are things you can do. The most important step you can take is staying calm. If there's another person with you, have her call your veterinarian while you perform CPR.

Step 1: Check for responsiveness

Before you begin doing anything to your pet, make sure he is truly unresponsive.

- Check his breathing by placing your hand in front of his nose and mouth. (Be sure not to cover them and block his airway!)
- Check for his heartbeat by placing your ear against area where your pet's left elbow touches the chest.

Step 2: Secure an airway

If you don't see or feel your pet breathing, you immediately need to make sure his airway is clear.

- *Carefully* pull his tongue forward out of his mouth. (Even an unresponsive animal can bite by instinct.)
- Look into the throat for a foreign object. If you find one, remove it carefully. (See [Pet First Aid](#) for instructions on responding to choking in pets.)
- Move the head until the neck is straight. (*Don't move the neck if you suspect it is injured.*)

Step 3: Rescue breathing

- Close your pet's mouth and breathe directly into his nose not his mouth until his chest expands.
- If the chest doesn't expand, check again for a foreign object in the throat and reposition the airway so it is straight.
- Once you've gotten the chest to expand, continue the rescue breathing, repeating the breaths 12 to 15 times per minute (once every four to five seconds).

Step 4: Chest compressions

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

- Gently lay your pet on his right side.

- The heart is located in the lower half of the chest on the left side, behind the elbow of the front left leg. Place one hand below the heart to support the chest; place the other hand over the heart.
- Press down gently on your pet's heart. Press down about one inch for medium-sized dogs; press harder for larger animals and with less force for smaller animals. To massage the hearts of cats and other tiny pets, compress the chest with the thumb and forefingers of one hand.
- Press down 80-120 times per minute for larger animals and 100-150 times per minute for smaller ones.
- Alternate the chest compressions with the rescue breaths.

Continue the heart massage compressions and the rescue breathing until you can hear a heartbeat and feel regular breathing. Once your pet is breathing and his heart is beating, call your veterinarian *immediately*.

Unfortunately, even in the hands of well-trained veterinary health professionals, the overall chance for success with resuscitation is low. In an emergency, however, it may give your pet his only chance.