

By Shelley Thayer
Executive Director, Cat Depot

Many years ago, I took a first aid class and afterwards wondered when, if ever, I would use any of the skills I had learned. Two weeks later, I was engrossed in a project that I had spread across the floor. Not wanting to take a break, I fixed a plate of food that I placed beside me while I continued to work. The aroma must have been too tempting for my cat, who suddenly snatched a large piece of food and ran. I chased in pursuit as we ran up and down the stairs several times until my cat suddenly came to a halt and went limp. Opening his mouth, I could see the food lodged in his throat, but I could not reach it. Putting my newly learned skills to work, I turned him over, head down and forcefully gave him three solid blows to the back with the palm of my hand. As he lay lifeless, I repeated the procedure and again—nothing happened. I flipped him over and used the Heimlich maneuver. The third thrust was the winner, and the



Purchasing or assembling a first aid kit for your pets prior to an emergency will enable you to handle a medical crisis until veterinary treatment is available. Photo by Marilyn Warner of Cat Depot

food went flying across the room. Kitty shook his head, caught his breath and took off without even a whisper of thanks. I too, was grateful beyond words.

Since then, I have gone through the normal bouts of worry that seem to accompany caring for a furry family member. I also have picked up some emergency tips along the way.

Administering first aid to a pet should

never be a substitute for veterinary care. It may, however, save your friend's life until you can seek veterinary treatment.

Emergency Preparedness Tips

+ Write emergency numbers on a card, and place them in your cupboard and in your cell phone. Include phone numbers for your veterinarian, your local veterinary emergency clinic and the Animal Poison Control Center—888-4ANI-HELP (888-426-4435)—which is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

+ Purchase or make a first aid kit with supplies for your animals. Most pet stores sell basic kits; they also can be purchased online, or you can assemble one yourself and keep it next to your human first aid kit.

I keep a kit in my home and a modified kit in my car for emergency roadside care. Kits should include: gauze for wrapping wounds and muzzling injured animals; non-stick bandages and small clean towels for wounds and bleeding; adhesive tape or vet wrap to secure gauze and bandages; tweezers; Milk of Magnesia-activated charcoal to absorb poison; hydrogen peroxide to induce vomiting (ONLY at the recommendation of a representative from the Poison Control Center or a veterinarian); a digital rectal thermometer (your pet's temperature must be taken rectally); Vaseline to coat the thermometer; a muzzle or a soft cloth to use as a muzzle; a stretcher, a small blanket, a board or a rug.

For my auto kit, I added a folded box (stretcher), a small blanket, a towel, latex and leather gloves and a folding shovel to remove deceased animals from the road. (I love birds, which are often maimed and killed when feeding on remains).

+ Learn basic handling skills for an injured animal. Even the most loving animal may bite or scratch if injured,



*Shelley Thayer,
Executive Director, Cat Depot*

in pain or confused. Keep your face away from the animal's mouth, and avoid the temptation to hug your pet as this could induce pain. Remain calm and slowly examine the body. Stabilize the injury by splinting or bandaging. Place the animal in a box, on a blanket or a rug, or wrap him in a towel for stable transport. If it is necessary to muzzle the animal, use gauze, a stocking or even a leash line. Be careful not to wrap the nose too tightly and keep the nose uncovered so the animal can breathe. Never muzzle an animal that is vomiting.

+ Always have your medical records handy. I keep each of my family members' records in a separately marked large baggie so I can grab it and go.

+ Read up on basic emergency care and learn what to do for seizures, fractures, bleeding, burns, choking, heatstroke, shock and CPR for animals. Cat Depot and other local animal organizations offer first aid and CPR classes throughout the year. Enroll in a class, or take advantage of the valuable information that is available on the Internet.

Most importantly, take the time to prepare now, so you can best help your loved one in an emergency. ❀

Cat Depot, one of the largest no-kill, nonprofit feline adoption centers in the nation, is dedicated to saving lives. Open seven days a week, Cat Depot is located at 2542 17th Street in Sarasota. For more information, call 941-366-2404 or visit www.CatDepot.org.