Cat Emergencies: Contact Your Veterinarian When Your Cat Shows These Symptoms

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The following information may help you decide which conditions are absolute emergencies, and which ones may let you take a "wait and see" attitude. If your cat is sick or injured and you are unsure of the severity of the condition, it is always best to err on the side of caution, and contact your veterinarian (or emergency clinic) right away.

Contact your veterinarian immediately if your cat:

Has signs of heart or respiratory disease including:

- No pulse or heart beat
- No breathing or severe difficulty breathing
- Bluish or white gums or tongue
- A near drowning

Has been exposed to a toxin or poison or has had trauma including:

- A broken bone, or a cut that exposes a bone
- Heavy bleeding that cannot be stopped
- An eye injury, the eye is out of the socket, or appears enlarged or protruding
- A fight, especially if it was with another cat or a wild, or unvaccinated animal
- A wound from a bullet or arrow
- Being hit by a vehicle or other large or fast-moving object
- Puncture wounds to the abdomen or chest
- Any trauma to the head
- A bite from a snake, scorpion, or poisonous spider; or has bitten a toad
- Porcupine quills imbedded in the mouth, face, or body
- A broken tooth, or the loss of a healthy tooth, including the root (keep the tooth in a small jar of milk)
- A severe laceration, or an incision that has opened and the skin is gaping
- Falling or jumping from an open window, balcony, etc.
- Swelling of the face and/or hives

Has had heat or cold related injuries including:

- Chewing on an electrical cord and receiving a shock or burn
- Burns or inhaled smoke
- Heat stroke or a fever over 105°F (normal is less than 102.5°F)
- Frostbite or hypothermia

Has signs of gastrointestinal distress including:

- Straining continually, but unable to produce feces
- Choking
- Vomiting blood or uncontrolled vomiting
- Swallowing a foreign body (e.g., toy, needle and thread)
- Diarrhea with blood, a foul smell, or that is uncontrolled
- Black, tarry stool
- A protruded rectum or bleeding from the rectum
- An overdose of medication or suspected poisoning

Has signs of nervous system or muscular disease including:

- Extreme lethargy or depression, unconsciousness, collapse, or coma
- Seizures
- A head tilt, nystagmus (eyes move rapidly from side to side), staggering, walking in circles, knuckling over (walking on the top of the foot), unable to use hind limbs, or other problems moving
- Severe or continuous pain
- Sudden inability to bear weight on one or more limbs

Has signs of urinary or reproductive problems including:

- Difficulty giving birth: no kitten after 24 hours of beginning labor; no kitten after 30-60 minutes of active straining; weak or infrequent contractions once labor has started; crying or licking the vulva area excessively; abnormal bleeding or vaginal discharge; weakness

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- Straining continually, but unable to pass urine, or the urine has blood in it
- A male who is continually licking his genital area (a sign of urinary obstruction)
- Crying while trying to urinate
- Bleeding from the urinary or genital area

Call your veterinarian the same day if your cat:

Has signs of heart or respiratory disease including:

- Some difficulty breathing, shallow breathing, or breathing at a faster rate (unassociated with physical exercise or environmental temperature)
- Continuous sneezing or coughing

Has signs related to digestion or food and water consumption including:

- Not eating or drinking for 24 hours
- Vomiting or diarrhea for more than 24 hours and acts depressed
- Drinking water excessively, unrelated to activity or environmental temperature

Has signs of nervous system or muscular disease including:

- Sudden change in behavior
- Crying when touched or picked up
- Cloudy eyes, squinting, or appears to be unable to see
- Sudden, severe lameness

Has signs of urinary or reproductive problems including:

- A retained afterbirth for over 8 hours
- A female who is pregnant or nursing her young and develops a red, swollen, or painful breast
- A male with swollen testicles or scrotum

Has signs associated with the skin including:

- A rash, excessive shedding, excessive head shaking, or persistent scratching or chewing at spots on the body
- Abnormal lumps or bumps that are painful, red, and/or hot to the touch
- Maggots
- A nosebleed for no apparent reason, bruising easily, or tiny red dots on the skin

Call your veterinarian in 24 hours if your cat has signs including:

Has signs related to digestion or food and water consumption including:

- Not eating, but no other signs of illness
- A soft stool, but there is no pain, blood, fetid odor, green or black color, mucus, or straining
- Occasional vomiting (2 or 3 times), but no abdominal pain or blood
- Foul breath
- Sudden weight gain or loss
- Drooling

Has signs of nervous system or muscular disease including:

- Lameness for more than 24 hours
- Swollen joints
- Lethargy, depression, sleeping more than usual, unwillingness to play or exercise

Has signs associated with the skin including:

- Moderate itching or an unpleasant odor from the coat
- A discharge from the eye, ear, or other body opening

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