

Feline First Aid

Knowing some basic first-aid techniques can help you save your kitten's life.

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3. Choking: If your kitten gets something stuck in its mouth or throat, it will cough or gasp suddenly. A kitten becomes frantic when scared, so wrap it in a towel and have someone else hold it while you try to look in the back of the throat. If you detect an object, try to spot it with a flashlight, then remove it with tweezers or a spoon handle. Be careful not to push the object further back into the kitten's throat. And be careful not to get bitten. Kittens have very sharp teeth and may bite without trying to or realizing it. 4. Bee stings: Kittens love chasing moving objects, including stinging bugs. "Bee stings or spider bites are often suspected but definitive diagnosis is uncommon unless the event is witnessed by the pet owner," said Steve Marks, Ph.D., associate professor and head of the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine's small animal medicine service. If a bee stings your kitten, immediately put ice on the sting to reduce pain and swelling. Use a magnifying glass to find the stinger. Pull it out with tweezers if possible. Clean the area and apply an antibiotic ointment. After treating your kitten for the bee sting, monitor it very closely for an allergic reaction. Although uncommon, allergic reactions can occur, and the kitten can go into shock. The tissues of the throat may swell and obstruct breathing, and blood pressure may plunge. This is a life-threatening complication. "In most cases, symptomatic care is appropriate. However, if the kitten has difficulty breathing, vomiting, diarrhea, the pet owner should seek veterinary advice immediately," Marks said. 5. Fractured limbs: Orthopedic injuries are common in kittens because they love to jump. When a kitten fractures a bone, the initial clinical sign is limping, holding the injured leg up, or walking on only three legs. Simple fractures in which both ends of the bone remain under the skin are not as bad as open fractures in which the bone breaks through the skin. Open fractures are at high risk of becoming infected. If you suspect a limb fracture, try to apply a temporary splint to immobilize the leg. A pencil, tongue depressor or piece of heavy cardboard works well. To effectively immobilize the leg, the splint must span the joint above and below the fracture. Wrap strips of clean cloth or gauze around the leg and the splint so that the leg cannot bend.