

This Skill Could Save Your Furry Friend's Life

In the critical moments of a pet emergency, knowing how to perform this on your dog could mean the difference between life and death.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- If your dog goes into cardiopulmonary arrest (CPA), meaning his heart stops beating and he's no longer breathing, it's a medical emergency that requires immediate veterinary care
- Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) can be lifesaving while you're on the way to an emergency vet
- CPR involves both chest compressions to help blood flow and breaths to provide oxygen; perform 30 chest compressions followed by two quick breaths, then repeat
- Compressions should be firm and quick, at a rate of 100 to 120 compressions per minute, which is similar to the beat of the song "Stayin' Alive"
- To give a rescue breath, be sure the windpipe is straight, close the dog's mouth and breathe directly into his nose until you see the chest expand

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If your dog goes into cardiopulmonary arrest (CPA), meaning his heart stops beating and he's no longer breathing, it's a medical emergency that requires immediate veterinary care. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) can be lifesaving while you're on the way to an emergency vet, but it's important to know how to do so ahead of time.

The first step is to make sure your pet needs CPR. Shake your pet and call his name, then check to see if he's breathing if he doesn't respond. Look, listen and feel for breathing by watching the chest, listening at the nose and mouth and feeling for air movement. You can check for a pulse by feeling the inside of the thigh, where the femoral artery is located.

If he is breathing, no CPR is needed — just get to the nearest veterinary office. If he's not, open your pet's mouth to check if his windpipe is clear. If the windpipe is blocked, carefully try to remove the object. You may need to **perform the Heimlich maneuver** if your pet is choking. However, if the windpipe is clear, you can proceed with the CPR steps that follow.

How to Perform Chest Compressions

CPR involves both chest compressions to help blood flow and breaths to provide oxygen. The general pattern is 30 chest compressions followed by two quick breaths, then repeat.¹

Place your dog on the floor, lying on his side, and kneel next to him, so his spine is toward your knees. You should perform compressions with your elbows locked and hands on top of one another, fingers interlocked.² The right spot for the compressions depends on your dog's size and breed:^{3,4}

- **Small dogs (and cats)** — Perform compressions over the heart. Use one hand or even your fingers (instead of two hands) so you don't press too hard.

Whole Dog Journal explains, "For chest compressions in a small dog, it is sometimes better to use your thumbs. With the dog on his side, one hand grabs the dog's top line, the other hand grabs the lower chest. With your thumbs facing each other and flat against the ribs behind the elbow start compressions, again with enough pressure to compress the rib cage."⁵

- **Medium, large and giant dogs** — Perform compressions over the widest part of the chest.
- **Dogs with narrow, deep chests, like greyhounds** — Perform compressions directly over the heart.
- **Dogs with flat chests, such as English bulldogs** — Lay the dog in his back and perform compressions over the breastbone.

Compressions should be firm and quick, at a rate of 100 to 120 compressions per minute, which is two compressions each second. An easy way to remember this is the rate is similar to the beat of the song “Stayin' Alive.” Compress the chest approximately one-third to one-half of its width, and allow the chest to rise between compressions.

How to Perform Rescue Breaths

After every 30 chest compressions, give two rescue breaths if you're alone. If two people are performing CPR, maintain a ratio of 30 compressions to two breaths, switching roles every two minutes so you don't get fatigued. Be sure to stop compressions while you perform rescue breaths so the air can get into the lungs.

To give a rescue breath, be sure the windpipe is straight, close the dog's mouth and breathe directly into his nose until you see the chest expand. You can use your hand as a seal around the dog's mouth to ensure no air escapes. Alternate between chest compressions and rescue breaths. If there's no response after two minutes, transport the dog to a veterinary clinic while continuing CPR.

Benefits of Getting Certified in Pet CPR

CPR for dogs can be physically demanding and not always successful, so it's best to receive hands-on training from a professional. **Get certified in pet CPR** so you're prepared in the event of an emergency. Being professional trained will give you the confidence to act quickly and effectively.

Further, since the methods for performing CPR effectively on animals varies based on the size and species of the pet, consulting a veterinarian or a professional trainer for detailed instructions and training ensures you learn the right method for your pet.

Remember, performing CPR immediately and correctly can significantly increase survival if your pet experiences a cardiac or breathing emergency. Further, as a pet guardian, knowing you're capable of performing CPR on your pet will give you peace of mind in knowing you can save your pet's life in a critical situation.

Sources and References

^{1,3} [Baker Institute for Animal Health, CPR for Your Dog or Cat](#)

^{2,4} [PetMD, October 6, 2024](#)

⁵ [Whole Dog Journal, February 17, 2024](#)
