

How To Save Your Choking Dog

Though not common, an obstruction in a dog's throat can be life-threatening. Occurring more often in puppies and in large-breed dogs, the owner of an afflicted pet must be able to quickly dislodge the foreign body in order save its life.

Dogs love to chew. Anything from a shoe or ball to a bone or hunk of wood can become a desirable item worthy of a good chew. Puppies, particularly, like to gnaw on things, due mostly to the need to help alleviate the discomfort of teething. Dogs given bones, rawhides, or toys to chew on run the risk of tearing off a section and getting it stuck in the throat. Additionally, the felt covers of tennis balls are often ripped off and swallowed. Large dogs with a tendency for wolfing down big bites of food can also suffer from unexpected food obstructions. What can you do if the unexpected happens?

First, remain calm. You can't help your dog if you panic. Remember, your pet's life will depend on you, so stay focused. Next, open the dog's mouth, pull its tongue forward and look closely for any foreign objects. If one is present, carefully grasp and remove it. If nothing is visible (or something is but cannot be firmly grasped):

- Position the animal so that its rear points toward you. If it is unable to stand, lay the dog on its side.
- Place your fist at a place just behind the dog's ribs.
- Quickly compress the abdomen three times. Be sure not to press too hard with a small dog, for fear of breaking ribs.
- Check the mouth and floor to see if the object has been expelled. Repeat if needed. Then take your dog to the vet immediately.

This procedure is akin to the Heimlich maneuver, so successful in saving human lives. Be sure to adjust the squeezing pressure you use according to the size of the dog; the compressions needed for a Great Dane are far too strong to use on a Chihuahua. If done correctly, the obstruction should be expelled.

Prevention is the best medicine, so try not to give your dog chew toys it can easily tear into bits, or rawhides that can be ripped into throat-sized portions. Monitor your dog when it chews, and keep all undesirable objects (shoes, tennis balls, clothing, etc.) away.

Do give your dog vet-approved chew toys, easily purchased in most pet stores. Avoid cooked bones, which can splinter and cause intestinal damage. Be sure your dog's food does not contain large pieces that can lodge in its throat.

By taking precautions and knowing how to perform the "doggy Heimlich," you should be able to keep your little chewer around for a long, long time!