

Sierra Animal Wellness Center

Specializing in Holistic, Integrative Veterinary
Medicine



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Heat Stroke: Signs, Treatment and Prevention

This summer has been hot, hot, hot and it looks like the heat is going to continue for a while. While our critters can't complain about the extreme heat the way we do, it doesn't mean they're not feeling the same discomfort. And, just as for humans, there comes a point when simply being hot, sweaty and somewhat miserable can cross the line into heat stroke and turn extremely dangerous for our four-legged friends. Don't risk your cat or dog's well-being this summer. Here's what to look for, how to treat and how to prevent heat stroke.

What is heat stroke?

Heat stroke happens when a dog or cat is exposed to extreme heat and the body loses the ability to regulate its temperature. Heat stroke in dogs and cats is typically associated with a temperature above 104°F. It must be taken very seriously. As your pet's temperature rises it makes the body unstable and can result in shock followed by collapse, seizure, organ damage, coma, and death.



Symptoms of heat stroke

Since our dogs and cats don't sweat the way we do, except on the pads of their feet, they mainly regulate their body temperature by panting. When heat stroke starts to set in they exhibit certain signs and symptoms, you just have to know what to look for. Symptoms can include:

1. Excessive panting or difficulty breathing
2. Heavy drooling, vomiting or diarrhea
3. Sweaty paws
4. Increased heart rate
5. Bright red tongue and gums that turn pale or gray as shock sets in
6. Staggering, weakness or lethargy

As cardiac circulation slows down your pet will still feel very hot but her paws will start to feel cold. Petechial hemorrhages may start to appear on the abdomen, followed by stupor and seizures.

Emergency Treatment for Heat Stroke

If you suspect that your four-legged friend is suffering from heat stroke, don't wait! Jump into action immediately! Here's what to do:

- Find cover. Get your friend out of the heat and into an air-conditioned building or somewhere that has a source of cool air.
- If not vomiting, offer cool - not ice cold - water
- Take your pup or kitty's rectal temp. If it is under 104° F getting him hydrated and into the cooler environment may be sufficient. Keep an eye on him or her and immediately call Dr. Peggy or your regular vet for advice. If 104° F or higher, proceed with the next steps.
- Place cool - again, not cold - wet clothes on the head, groin and paws
- Call the clinic or if closed, an emergency veterinary hospital right away and let them know you are on your way.

While it is critical to cool your friend down, if you continue with drastic cooling processes too long, your furry friend is in danger of suffering from shock or hypothermia. That is just another reason it is so critical to get veterinary help right away. Depending on the severity and damage done, intensive treatment may be required. The longer you wait, the worse the internal issues can become. Do not wait to see if your kitty or pup will get better on her own. ***Basically, get her into the air-conditioned car and on the way to the veterinarian.***

Tips for Prevention

You can prevent heat stroke all together by taking a few simple precautions. Be sure to take frequent breaks from the summer sun by heading inside or into the shade, and always have plenty of fresh cool water available. When it's really hot outside, avoid vigorous exercise and head for the indoors. And just in case you haven't heard, **never, ever, ever leave your pet in the car, even for a short period of time!**



Take extra precautions with very young or very old critters as they are more at risk for heat stroke. So are critters who are overweight, or have kidney or breathing issues. So are brachycephalic - flat faced - breeds such as Persian or British Shorthair cats for example, or Pugs, Boxers or English Bulldogs.

Heat stroke is so easy to prevent, there's no reason why you can't implement these simple steps no matter where you are.

After all, you want to enjoy many more summers with your furry BFF!

If you have any questions, give us a call at (530) 346-6611. Until next time, be well.

- Dr. Peggy

California Says "NO" to Leaving Animals in a Hot Vehicle

(This article was originally published a couple of years ago but with the potential for avoidable tragedies, it bears repeating.)

Did you know that in California it is illegal to leave a pet in the car on a summer day? Violation of this law is punishable by a fine, imprisonment or both. Far worse than the legal consequences are the countless, unnecessary deaths of pets every summer because owners simply do not understand the severity of their actions. Often people leave their dogs in the car while they shop or run errands "for just a minute", but doing so when the weather is warm can literally be a death sentence for your pet. When temperatures start to climb it is much better to let your furry friends stay home. Here are five reasons why leaving a cat or dog in a hot car can be deadly:



1. Dogs and cats are especially vulnerable to heat-related illness because they can only cool off through the pads in their feet and by panting.
2. Studies show that cracking the windows has little to no effect on a car's internal temperature. Even on seemingly mild days, an enclosed car can be deadly. In a Stanford University study, when it was 72 degrees outside, a car's internal temperature climbed to 116 degrees within one hour. In a study by San Francisco State University, when it was 80 degrees outside, the temperature inside a car rose to 99 degrees in 10 minutes and 109 degrees in 20 minutes.
3. A dog or cat can only withstand a high body temperature for a short time before

suffering serious damage or even death.

What happens to animals left in hot cars? Exposure to excessive heat causes the body's cells to stop working properly and release dangerous chemicals which can lead to nerve damage, heart problems, liver damage, brain damage, uncontrolled bleeding and death. Essentially, all of the dog's organ systems shut down at once.

Signs a dog or cat is suffering from a heat-related illness include excessive panting, drooling, increased heart rate, trouble breathing, disorientation, collapse or loss of consciousness, seizure and even respiratory arrest.

What should you do if you see an animal in a hot car? If you come across a situation where a pet has been left in a vehicle and is in danger, call 911 immediately. Time is of the essence! Leave your name and phone number with the person who takes the call in case the responding officers need more information. Go inside the nearest businesses and ask the manager to make an announcement.

A peace officer, humane officer, or animal control officer is authorized to take all steps that are reasonably necessary for the removal of an animal from a motor vehicle, including, but not limited to, breaking into the motor vehicle, after a reasonable effort to locate the owner or other person responsible.

If your dog is suffering from heatstroke, cool her down as quickly as possible using cool - not cold - water and call Dr. Peggy or the nearest vet immediately. Heatstroke can be caused by various circumstances - DON'T LET ONE OF THEM BE NEGLIGENCE!

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Monday, Thursday and Friday
from 9:00 to 6:00

Tuesday from 9:00 to 3:00

Wednesday from 12:00 to 6:00

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