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# Heat Stroke



-Dr. Wes Sperry

Welcome to summer in the DFW area: blazing heat, little rain, and no relief in sight. This time of year offers specific risks to your pets in the form of heat stroke.

Heat stroke happens when your pet's temperature rises (hyperthermia) to a point that is detrimental to the animal. Dog and cats' temperatures normally range from 100° to 102.5°. With heat stroke their temperatures routinely reach above 104° to 106°. If this is not rectified immediately, death can rapidly occur.

## Risk Factors

While heat stroke can happen any time of year, it is most common during the summer months, especially when the temperatures are routinely in the triple digits. While cats can experience heat stroke, it is mainly a problem in dogs.

One risk factor that many people do not realize is just being a snub-nosed (brachycephalic) breed, such as a Bulldog or Pug. Dogs do not sweat like we do. The primary method by which dogs cool themselves and regulate their body temperature is by panting. Brachycephalic breeds often have trouble breathing, and cannot move as much air as other breeds; therefore it is harder for them to cool themselves. Owners of brachycephalic dogs need to be more cautious during the heat by limiting the amount of time the dogs are outside and active.

Animals that have heart conditions can be at increased risk for heat stroke. Also animals that have any sort of obstructive airway disease (such as Labradors with laryngeal paralysis) will be unable to move air well enough to cool themselves properly.

## Preventative Tips

- Shade and Water- Make sure that any animal outside has access to shade and fresh water. Even if it is only for a few minutes, they can become overwhelmed by the heat without water. Please remember that during the heat dogs (and cats) will drink more water, so it is advisable to use a larger bowl than normal to ensure the pet does not run out. Multiple bowls are also recommended in case one is tipped over.
- Do not leave pets outside unattended. Check them often to make sure they are ok, have not turned over their water, etc.
- Limit exercise- This is especially important with playful dogs. Playing inside is fine, but outside, just like us, the heat can zap them very quickly. Also, **DO NOT RELY ON THE DOG TO LIMIT ITSELF**. Many dogs will not stop playing, chasing a ball, barking at the neighbors, etc, even when they are overheated. For instance, a Labrador Retriever will retrieve until it dies. It is up to you to stop throwing the ball and make the dog take a break and drink water.
- Choose your times to play- Just like we don't mow our lawns at noon, but rather do it in the early morning or late evening to beat the heat, so should you play or go for long walks with your pet as well.
- Limit time outside. It does not take long for the heat to become overwhelming. If your dog is active, even if it's just pacing the fence or barking at the neighbors (normal activities for your pet) then the time is even shorter.
- For sporting dogs like Labs, etc, having a child's wading pool in the shade for them to splash in is helpful.

- Remember, brachycephalic (snub-nosed) dogs like bulldogs and pugs are extremely susceptible to heat stroke, and can get overwhelmed just sitting in the shade. With these breeds, you need to take extra precautions.
- **DO NOT LEAVE YOUR PET IN THE CAR, EVEN FOR "JUST A SECOND", EVEN WITH THE A/C ON.** Pets' temperature will elevate to overheating within a few minutes in a car. Dogs have been known to hit the a/c controls as they are walking around and turn them off. Cracked windows do NOT lower the temperature in a car enough.

## What to do if you suspect your pet is overheated

The first thing to do is get them cool. If they are conscious/able to stand, hose them off quickly with cool (not cold) water. Let the water run over their back and down under their arms onto their belly. You can also use a fan if possible. You can apply rubbing alcohol to the pads of their feet.

If they are not conscious, you can still hose them down, but be careful of getting water in their nose, etc.

Dry them roughly before transportation. A sopping wet coat is often more warming than cooling during a car ride. They don't have to be completely dry, being damp is ok.

SEEK HELP IMMEDIATELY. Get your pet to the veterinarian NOW. Especially if your pet is unconscious. If it is after hours, go to the [emergency clinic](#). In many cases the animal's body systems can go into shock and shut down. Treatment should be started immediately, and involves IV fluids, cooling, and constant monitoring. Do not keep cooling at home. There is a possibility of overcooling and causing the pet to become hypothermic.

Heat stroke is an insidious disease. Even after we get the pet cooled and feeling better, we are not out of the woods. Side effects of the disease can be just as deadly, and can show up a day to a week later. These include organ failure, intestinal sloughing, and neurological damage. In the case of heat stroke, prevention is the best cure.