

Cat and Dog Bites

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Cat and dog bites are common injuries. A family pet or a stray could bite you. Below are tips to treat and prevent animal bites.

Path to safety

If a cat or dog bites you, you should:

- Wash the wound gently with soap and water.
- Apply pressure with a clean towel to the injured area to stop any bleeding.
- Apply a sterile (sterile) bandage to the wound.
- Keep the wound elevated above your heart (heart) to prevent swelling and infection (infection).

Severe bites may require additional medical attention. Call your doctor if:

- your bite becomes infected. Symptoms include redness, swelling, warmth, and pus (pus). You also may have a fever (fever).
- bleeding doesn't stop after 15 minutes of pressure.
- you think you have a broken bone, nerve (nerve) damage, or serious injury.
- you have [diabetes](#) or a condition that weakens your immune (immune) system. This includes liver (liver) or lung disease, [cancer](#), or AIDS (AIDS).
- your last tetanus (tetanus) vaccine (vaccine) was more than 5 years ago. If so, you may need a booster shot.
- you got bit by a wild or stray animal.
- you got bit by a pet of unknown vaccination (vaccination) status.

Treatment for cat and dog bites varies. It is based on the situation and severity of your injury. Below are some things your doctor may do.

- Examine your wound for nerve, tendon (tendon), or bone damage.
- Check for signs of infection.
- Clean your wound with a special solution and remove any damaged tissue (tissue).
- Use stitches to close your wound. However, open wounds often heal faster and are less likely to get infected.
- Prescribe an antibiotic to prevent infection.
- Give you a tetanus shot if your last vaccine was more than 5 years ago.

Most people who have cat and dog bites do not need a rabies (rabies) shot. The disease is uncommon in cats and

dogs in the United States. However, it is common in wild animals, like raccoons, skunks, bats, and coyotes. If you know the owner of the cat or dog that bit you, ask for their health records. They will show the pet's vaccination records. It may be a good idea to isolate the pet and monitor it for signs of rabies. If the animal does show signs, a veterinarian will test it for the disease. If positive, you will need to get a series of rabies shots. You'll get 2 shots right away and 3 more shots over a 14-day period.

If the cat or dog that bit you is a stray, call animal control. They will try to find the animal to test it for rabies. In this situation, your doctor may or may not recommend the rabies shots. If needed, report your bite incident to the proper authority. This could be animal control or the police.

Your doctor may want you to follow up with them. If your wound gets worse or infection starts, call your doctor right away. You may need to see a specialist if your injury is severe.

Things to consider

There are many things you can do to help prevent cat and dog bites.

- Choose your family pet carefully. Be sure to keep their vaccinations up-to-date.
- Never leave a young child alone with a pet. They often don't know how to be gentle with the pet. This can cause the pet to get mad and bite.
- Do not try to separate fighting animals. You may get bit in the process.
- Avoid contact with animals that are sick or have unknown vaccination records.
- Do not disturb animals alone while they are eating. Animals often are protective of their food.
- Keep your pets on a leash when in public.

Questions to ask your doctor

- What are the signs or symptoms of rabies?
- When should I get authorities involved?
- What should I do with my family pet if it bites someone?

Resources

[American Academy of Family Physicians, Dog and Cat Bites](#)

[World Health Organization, Animal Bites](#)