

## **Bites, Bite! How to Avoid Getting Bitten**

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### Introduction

Whenever you approach an animal you should take the time to ensure your personal safety first, the safety of those working with you and the animal's safety. Most animals do not respond well to aggressive, fast movements. It is imperative, no matter what the emergency that you take the time to look at the animal and read its behavior. Animals may be unpredictable therefore causing you to need to be prepared for the unexpected.

### Canine

In a perfect world you would just place a leash around the dog's neck, the dog would go with you willingly and you would never have to touch the dog. Remember the more you handle and animal the more chance you have of being injured. No handling is the best policy.

When dealing with a dog please do so in an enclosed area. Dogs often give notice, sometimes very subtle, before they become aggressive (see conflict signs below). Most dogs that bite, bite out of fear and would rather be left alone than attack outright. If you must handle a dog (picking a dog up, bandaging a leg) please use appropriate restraint devices (see list below).

### Conflict Behaviors

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Yawning</li><li>• Licking Lips, Nose (dry mouth syndrome)</li><li>• Staring upwards or away</li><li>• Scratching at self</li><li>• "Smiling" (teeth are bared, but tucked back against mouth)</li><li>• Freezing/Unable to move</li><li>• Shaking (wet dog shaking)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Licking at self</li><li>• Rolling over</li><li>• Urinating</li><li>• Cowering/tucking tail</li><li>• Barking/whining</li><li>• Spinning/Tail Chasing</li><li>• Play bow</li><li>• Some types of aggression or threats</li></ul>
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### Happy Dogs

A happy relaxed dog will come INTO your space on its own. If they don't enter your space they would rather be left alone. Dogs that are relaxed have their ears up, the whites of eyes not showing and their tails up. The tail wagging can have many different meanings so it's important to focus on the head to understand if the dog is happy about your being in its space or not.

To say hello to a dog to judge its behavior you should offer an open palm, slightly away from your side. Never reach up over the dog's head. Instead let the dog come and investigate you. If the dog continues forward to engage you they likely want to be in your space. If they sniff you and back off they likely do not.

## Think, But Not With Emotions

Muzzling does not hurt a dog. It is often the human who gets more upset because they worry about what the dog thinks. What the dog is thinking is most likely that it does not want to be at the veterinary clinic. It is likely going to have a procedure done to it that will evoke fear or pain or both. Therefore, that dog has every reason to bite. If a dog shows any signs of conflict muzzling or other appropriate restraint is important for your safety. A good veterinary staff has the ability to communicate to the owner about the importance of restraint and how a muzzle does not hurt and the dog will likely be in the same amount of distress regardless of the muzzle or not. It has been well documented that basket muzzles cause less stress to staff and are safer than the nylon muzzles. Conditioning dogs at a young age to be muzzled (like it is a game) should be encouraged in the event veterinary staff need to utilize such skill later in the dog's life.

## Reminders on different restraining techniques

NEVER stand in front of a dog when attempting to muzzle the dog.

Always stand behind.

NEVER attempt to deal with a highly aggressive dog by yourself.

Always have at least one other person to help you.

NEVER use nylon/cloth/woven collars and leashes (what the typical owner uses)

Always use a slip lead (ideally two)

NEVER yell or scream at a dog.

Always act calm and quiet. Speak to the dog in terms they know.

NEVER use physical force to punish a dog.

Always let the dog know what IS appropriate behavior.

NEVER stare or "growl" at a dog or grab a dog by its collar. #1 way to get bitten

Always barely make eye contact and use the "open" palm. Use slip leads rather than grab for the collar.

## Tricks of the Trade

Aggressive dog in crate: Tip the crate up on its end. Carefully open the door and loop the leash around the dog's head. Slowly tip the crate back to its normal position. Remove the dog. This technique can be done with a rabies (catch) pole as well. For small dogs you can take the crate apart. NEVER reach in!

Fear aggressive dog: Always encourage this type of dog to come out to you. Avoid making eye contact and be calm and quiet around the dog. Move slowly around this type of dog.

Short-nosed dogs: Treat more like a cat. Most of these breeds are small (under 20#) and you can throw a blanket over them or Elizabethan collar. There are "pug" muzzles out there, but they are difficult to put on the dog.

## Different Restraint Methods

### Muzzle

Remember to never approach from the front. Ideally commercial muzzles should always be used. Basket muzzles allow the dog to breathe better, feel less

constrained and are safer for veterinary personal. You can also make a muzzle out of a roll of rolled gauze, shoelace or even rope.

#### Blankets

Large blankets can be used for fractious dogs under 40# of weight. Please note: A blanket may not protect you from getting bitten.

#### Elizabethan Collar

These can be easily placed on highly aggressive dogs.

#### Wildlife Gloves

Can be used in dogs less than 20# and may help protect against bites.

#### Rabies/Catch Pole

Can be used on any size dog and is useful when needing to extricate a dog from a small space that is unwilling or a dog that is actively aggressive.

#### Lying a Dog Down

Remember to hold the “down” leg. Two people for a big dog.

### Feline

Cats are faster and more unpredictable than dogs. Cats sometimes give little to no notice before they become aggressive. More people are injured (bites/scratches) by cats than dogs. Cats often bite and scratch out of fear and would rather be left alone than attack outright. It is best to assume all cats have aggressive tendencies. Some cats do better with “less” restraint, however ALL cats should be restrained.

While we restrain dogs using leashes, we cannot use a leash on a cat. Instead our primary tool to restrain a cat is by restraining their neck, but not scruffing them. While scruffing use to be the most common restraint technique, it is now proven that scruffing usually causes cats to become more aggressive. At no time should cats be carried up near your face or hugged like a baby. All cats should be carried like a football, with head and feet restrained. Carrying a cat in a blanket is one of the safest methods. Gloves, nets, blankets and muzzles should be used when appropriate. Elizabethan collars can be useful tools to help protect you against aggressive cats. Reading a cat’s behavior is equally as important as knowing how to restrain it. Be sure to look for the “conflict” behavior in all cats.

Never reach in to a cat’s carrier. It is scary and can result in being bitten. Instead always take the top off.

### Conflict Behaviors

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hissing</li><li>• Growling</li><li>• Shaking</li><li>• Flicking the tip part of the tail quickly back and forth</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unable to move/freeze</li><li>• Hair standing on end</li><li>• Ears back</li><li>• Hiding</li></ul>
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## Reminders on different restraining techniques

NEVER stand in front of a cat when trying to do any procedure (bandage, take temperature)

NEVER attempt to deal with a highly aggressive cat by yourself.

Always have at least one other person to help you.

NEVER yell or scream at a cat.

Always act calm and quiet.

NEVER use physical force to punish a cat.

Sometimes less restraint is better, but a cat should always be restrained.

NEVER let go of a cat's head.

Always have at least one hand on their neck at all times.

NEVER place a leash on a cat's neck

This will likely cause the cat to strangle itself.

## Different Restraint Methods

### Muzzle

Remember to never approach from the front. Ideally hard plastic commercial muzzles should always be used. Soft nylon ones are not effective.

### Blankets

Large blankets can be used for fractious cats. Wrap them up tightly like a sausage so that only their head is exposed. Please note: A blanket may not protect you from getting bitten.

### Elizabethan Collar

These can be easily placed on highly aggressive cats.

### Gloves

Gloves with metal staples protect the best against bites.

### Nets or the cat "nabber"

Works well for loose cats or cats in cages

### Getting Cats Out Of Carriers

Reach in with EXTREME caution. Tip the cat towards you and catch in a blanket or be wearing gloves. Open top of carrier and "surprise" from the top.

## CHEMICAL RESTRAINT

With the advancement of pharmaceuticals there are safer drugs for all ages and breeds. Gone are the days of wrestling and creating more tension and anxiety between you and the patient. Ultimately sedation allows for a better relationship, decrease in bites and a decrease in

aggression. It is imperative that technicians who find themselves in an aggressive situation ask their veterinarian for chemical restraint.

## SETTING UP THE HOSPITAL FOR SUCCESS

There are things that can be done to help reduce the stress of patients within the hospital. This is key to the success of handling these patients and, while these things seem small, they can make a large difference. More and more behavioral research has come out showing that focusing on reduction of stress within the hospital is as important as the staff knowing how to restrain appropriately.

## WAITING AREA

Cats and dogs become even more stressed if they can hear, smell and see each other in the waiting area. Having a separate waiting area for cats/dogs is best. If that is not possible immediately escorting cats in to a cat-only exam room is best. If that is not possible then placing a towel over the cat's carrier is still better than allowing the dog and cat to stare at each other. By the time the cat gets in to the exam room it is ready to kill the technician or the dog is so amped up it takes it out on the veterinarian.

## CANINE

They do make a pheromone infuser to help destress dogs. It certainly does no harm to try it, but it is the author's experience that dogs are more manageable than cats. Dogs also get out of their homes more so it is a less stressful event for them.

The best thing that a veterinary clinic can do is to work desensitization techniques when the dog is a puppy. Have the puppy come in for a free visit...ideally once a week where the puppy comes in, gets fed treats, hangs out in an exam room and someone with a white coat comes in and gives them treats. Have the owner desensitize them to a basket muzzle (peanut butter goes a long way) and make it fun! The first visit shouldn't be the vaccine! That said peanut butter and spray cheese will solve most anxiety issues in most puppies.

For the older dog getting them in to a room is key because it reduces the environmental stressors. From there treats can be offered and praise is key. Be sure to connect to the dog first when coming in to the room and offer an open palm, avert your eyes and talk to them in tones and words they know.

## FELINE

Using Feliway pheromones, catnip, warm towels, dim lit and quiet rooms have all been shown to decrease cat's stress. Since none of those things are harmful then there is no harm in trying. If you can, try offering high end treats (fish based) or even tuna fish. Let the cat come out and get acclimated.

Encourage owners to bring in kittens to get use to the sights and sounds of the hospitals without any vaccines or procedures occurring. Have them explore exam rooms. Offer treats and playtime. Let the staff in white coats handle them. Let owners know that soft sided carriers are bad for cats (they do not offer protection) and that top drop plastic carriers are best. Let them know that covering the carrier in a towel reduces stress. Having a feline only room is very helpful and certainly having a feline only area in the back for hospitalization is key as well.

While in the hospital having a closed kennel area for just cats with feliway infusers is key. Keeping the area warm, sprinkling catnip will help reduce stress. Ensure cats are not facing other cats or dogs. Putting privacy curtains up and boxes will help decrease stress.

While it seems superficial decreasing stress means less stressed cats and therefore less bites and injury. This makes the staff happier.

## CONCLUSION

Remember that you are there to do a job. It's hard to separate out emotion from medicine when working with pets. Remember they are not your friends. There are many ways to decrease their stress level and ways we can work with them better to reduce their anxiety and suffering and increase our safety.