

## Heimlich How-To for Your Dog

### Tips to perform the canine Heimlich.

*Nikki Moustaki*

I sat down in front of the TV for an evening snack and a rerun of “Friends” – just a typical night. The episode was about Rachel having her baby, and the snack was rice cakes.

As usual, my two Miniature Schnauzers, Ozzie and Pepper, sat at my feet waiting for a morsel, eyes wide, ears pricked, hot doggie breath engulfing the area. I don’t usually give them people food, but sometimes what I’m eating is fine for them to have, and I’m a sucker for blatant displays of cuteness.

I broke off two pieces of rice cake and gave one to each dog. Pepper chewed his down, but Ozzie, the food-hound of the duo, gulped it and then coughed. Then he opened his mouth, gagged, and couldn’t cough anymore. The food was lodged in his throat.

Oddly, I didn’t panic. I got up and stood over him and checked to see if he was breathing. He wasn’t. He pawed at his muzzle, his mouth open.

I had read an article about the canine Heimlich maneuver a week before, so I straddled him and placed my fist under his chest and pushed upward pretty hard. Nothing happened. I did it two more times, a little harder, and the piece of rice cake flew out of his mouth.

I reached to grab it, but before I could, Ozzie grabbed it and gulped it down. Schnauzers clearly don’t entertain too many deep thoughts about mortality.

“It has been my experience that dogs have a better chance of getting the object out themselves if they are able to cough or gag, and only in a few incidents have I needed to intervene and extricate the object with my fingers,” says Denise Fleck, pet first-aid and CPR instructor and creator of Sunny-dog Ink Pet First-Aid Kits. “Always be extremely careful when attempting to remove anything from your pet’s mouth because you could push the object farther down your dog’s throat, tear at the throat tissue, or get bitten in the process.”

Here are some of Fleck’s tips on how to perform the canine Heimlich: Stand or kneel behind your dog, and place your arms around his waist. Clasp your hands together to make a fist. Place your fist just below his last set of ribs. Compress the abdomen by pushing up in a quick, rapid manner. This is similar to the Heimlich maneuver performed on humans. This method, however, has the potential to cause damage to a dog’s internal organs, so be careful. Canine ribs are more flexible than human ones, and a sub-abdominal thrust can cause the lungs to flail and may not create enough pressure to expel the item. In this case, use chest thrusts. To do this, place your hands on each side of your dog’s chest and thrust inward, pushing with your shoulders and elbows in the direction you want the object to go – out the mouth. Think of the motion as similar to using fireplace bellows. After two thrusts, give the dog a moment to cough, and/or look inside his mouth to see if the object is now reachable. If not, repeat. If at any time your dog becomes unconscious due to the obstruction of his airway, begin rescue breathing and CPR, and rush to your veterinarian or emergency vet clinic. After you are able to dislodge an obstruction in your dog’s throat, promptly visit your vet to check for any injury or health issue.

Consult with your veterinarian about how to perform the canine Heimlich so you’ll be prepared should your dog need it.

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