

How to Help a Choking Dog

Veterinarian Leslie Sinclair, DVM explains how to save your dog from a deadly airway obstruction.

Leslie Sinclair, DVM

Q. How do I help a choking dog?

Leslie Sinclair, DVM says: Dogs rarely choke, but when it happens, its usually the result of a large chunk of food or a toy (especially a small ball) that has been inhaled and is caught in the dogs airway. A choking dog appears anxious and struggles to breathe. He may quickly become unconscious. In a weak or unconscious dog, it is often possible to simply reach into the back of the mouth and remove the object if it has not become too deeply lodged. Open the dogs mouth, pull on his tongue to extend and open the mouth, and use a bright light, such as a flashlight, to look for the object causing the dog to choke. If you can't see it, or you can't remove it with your fingers, gently lift the dog into the air by his back legs, with his head hanging down. If he is too large to suspend, stand him on his front legs, holding his rear legs in the air so that he assumes a wheelbarrow position. If this action does not result in the removal of the object, the Heimlich maneuver may dislodge it.

Performing the Heimlich maneuver on a dog is similar to doing so on a human. Place the dog in front of you, facing away from you, encircle him with your arms, and place a fist just below his rib cage. Compress the abdomen several times with your fist in a thrusting manner, then check the mouth to see if the object came free. If it has, but the dog is not breathing, administer CPR, and contact a veterinary hospital.

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