

Beating the heat- how to keep your dog safe in warm temperatures

Whether temperatures have just started to rise in the spring or summer is in full swing, you need to be aware of how the heat can affect your dog. This can apply if you are just visiting warmer climates with your dog too. Knowing how to keep your dog cool, recognize the symptoms of heat stroke and knowing what to do about it could save your dog's life!

Just as it takes us awhile to get used to seasonally warmer temperatures, dogs also have an adjustment period. This can be aided or hindered by how much fur they shed and how often they are brushed. If your dog is not yet used to being in (or exercising in) warmer temperatures take it easy and watch him closely.



Ways you can help your dog adjust to and cope with heat:

- **Give your dog plenty of brushing**, especially when they are going through a shedding cycle. The dog's coat can help insulate the skin from high or low temperatures, but if there is a layer of dead hair blocking a cooling air flow, the dog can overheat more quickly and heat generated by the dog's body will get trapped close to the skin. Shaving a dog may seem like a good thing to do, but can actually cause more problems than it solves. Instead, just be sure to give the dog a thorough daily brushing to remove dead hair. Using a shedding blade or comb can help reduce mats and dead hair build up more so than a soft brush or standard comb.
- **Limit the dog's time in the heat.** Even if they are swimming, exertion in high heat can cause the dog's internal temperature to rise to dangerous levels with surprising speed. If the dog is not yet acclimated to the heat, even a simple slow walk could cause danger. This is especially true in short nosed breeds, elderly dogs, young puppies and dogs with thick coats. Give the dog access to a cool basement, air conditioning in your home or, if you are traveling, you might need to use your car's air conditioning to cool the dog.
- **Use a cooling coat or white T-shirt** on dark colored dogs. Black and dark fur absorbs the heat from the sun. Putting a special cooling coat, reflective coat or even a simple white T-shirt on the dog can keep him much cooler. Never leave these on an unsupervised dog however.
- **Use water to your advantage.** Giving the dog access to a kiddie pool that is in the shade can help the dog cool himself. But be sure it stays in the shade, or it might become a hot tub! A sprinkler could also be used if you don't mind mud and your dog doesn't drink too much water. If you know your dog will be exerting himself, wet the dog first. This can be especially effective if you wet the areas with thinner hair and where blood vessels are closest to the surface. This includes the head, armpits, legs, belly, feet and groin. Having the dog lie down in a small pool of water just before exertion can help keep the dog's temperature from rising too fast as the water evaporates and causes cooling.
- **Ice treats can help cool the dog.** Make your dog a shaved ice snow cone flavored with apple juice or carrot juice. You can make ice cubes out of fruit or vegetable juice too. Another fun treat, especially for large dogs, is a bucket of ice with treats and toys frozen into it. As the ice melts or gets chewed/licked more goodies come free. If you remove the ice from the bucket your dog has more sides from which to get the treats.

If the dog overheats:

Learn the signs of heat stroke (Hyperthermia) so you can act quickly to lower your dog's temperature before internal damage or death occurs.

Signs:

- **Heavy or labored panting/breathing.** If the dog sounds like he's having trouble breathing or can't catch his breath, the dog may be too hot.
- **Wide/long tongue** – the warmer the dog, the more tongue you will see and the wider the end of his tongue will get. It might also get very red from high blood pressure and the body's attempt to get as much blood to the cooler skin surface as possible.
- **Excessive drooling**- the dog is trying to use evaporation in his mouth to increase the cooling effects of panting. But this can cause dehydration, which can cause additional health problems. The dog can only cool himself through his mouth and foot pads. So be careful if your dog is walking on hot pavement as this can also cause a quick rise in body heat even if the air is not overly warm.
- **Seeking shade or a cool spot.** Dogs usually know when they need to cool down. If your dog is pulling for shade, it's time to let him rest a bit in a cool location.
- **Sluggishness or refusing to move.** The dog is trying to conserve and reduce his energy level so his temperature doesn't rise further. If your dog refuses to move or collapses, that could be a big warning sign.
- **Weakness of the muscles.** In advancing stages, the dog will not be able to stand or walk.

What to do:

- **Get cool (NOT cold) water** on the head, arm pits, belly, legs, feet and groin. You don't want to use cold water as this could send the dog into shock (like jumping into an ice cold swimming pool on a hot day.) Rubbing alcohol or wet towels could also be used. Only let the dog drink small, frequent amounts to limit vomiting.
- **Get the dog into air conditioning** if possible. This could be in a car or building. If not available, get the dog to the shade or a cooler location as quickly as possible.
- **Do the above steps on your way to the vet's office.** A dog's normal temperature is around 101 degrees. They can only handle 107+ degree internal temperature for a few minutes before internal organ and brain damage starts to occur. If the dog has shown signs of heat stroke, get the dog to a vet even if you bring his temperature back down. He may need IV fluids, further treatment and/or help with the side effects like vomiting, diarrhea, seizures and blood clots. The vet can do a blood test to determine if internal organ damage has occurred.

Prevention is the best medicine. Use good judgment based on the information above and knowledge about your dog to decide if being outside or doing a specific activity is safe for you and your dog.

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