



**Pittwater Animal Hospital**

We are your pet's other best friend.

## FACT SHEET

### Heat Stress Can Be Fatal

It's usually our fault. When a dog, cat, aquarium fish or budgie suffers heat stress, it's generally because we don't consider their different metabolisms. Unlike us, most animals can't reduce their body heat through perspiration. What they do instead is pant. The problem is, they can only lose so much heat through panting.

Animals suffering heat stroke first seem to become excited. Then, as the blood vessels in the brain engorge, they'll experience a loss of balance and seizures. Next they go into a coma as a number of changes take place within their body organs. Heart failure is common.

At the first sign of heat stress, emergency first aid becomes vital followed quickly by a trip to Pittwater Animal Hospital. While you're contacting us, cool your pet by sponging him/her with water (room temperature *not* iced) or hosing. While your pet's still wet, position it in front of a fan.

In most cases we will need to medicate your pet to control any seizures and to prevent further brain damage. This could include an anaesthetic. We may also give him/her a water enema to reduce body temperature. And likely put him/her on an intravenous drip.

Here are some of the more common causes of heat stress.

#### Hot cars

You've no doubt seen media reports of babies being left in cars on hot, summer days and dying within a relatively short time. Rarely do you hear of dogs expiring the same way. But it happens - all the time – because dogs are even more susceptible to heat stress than babies. Especially short-nosed breeds like bulldogs and pugs, or dogs that are overweight or have a respiratory disease. The same goes for both dogs and cats with poor circulation.

As a rule of thumb, if it's hot enough for you to perspire after even mild exertion, it's too hot to leave your dog alone in a car. Even after putting the windows down. Even if all you intend to do is pop into the shops for some bread or a paper. You know as well as we how easy it is to become distracted by a magazine cover or running into a friend.

If you drive a hatchback or any other car with lots of glass, the risk increases. So too if your car is a dark colour. Research studies have shown that the temperature inside a dark hatchback can be twice that outside. And it takes only a few minutes for

temperatures to soar high enough to kill your dog. High humidity and a lack of air circulation only make things worse.

### **Jogging**

Do you like the idea of your dog trotting faithfully by your side as you jog over hill and dale? Well, that same faithfulness could be its downfall. Rather than be left behind, your dog could ignore its own body urgings to take a break. As a result, it could collapse from heat stress.

If you want to jog with your best friend, do so in the cooler hours, either early morning or late evening. And keep an eye on your canine companion. If he or she seems to be struggling to keep up, stop for a while. In fact, periodic rest breaks supplemented with drinks of water are a very good idea. If practical, go for a cooling swim.

### **Tethered or confined animals**

Dogs, goats, horses – any animal that has its movement restricted outdoors can die from heat stress. It could happen in a back garden or a sprawling paddock, concrete pen or bird cage. If the animal can't escape the heat, it's at risk.

If there's no way to avoid tethering your animal, you must be absolutely certain it has all the shade it needs. Aviaries, birdcages and kennels should all be located in the shade, ideally with insulated roofs. You might also consider providing a sleeping area under the house for your dog. Water bowls, too, should always be placed in a shady location. (If it's really hot, provide more than one.)

Incidentally, another danger of tethering is asphyxiation. It's not uncommon for an animal to twist its tether around a post or tree and end up choking itself.

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