

DOG AND CAT HANDLING AND RESTRAINT

You've heard the expression "it's raining cats and dogs." You'll think of it often as a veterinary assistant. Dogs and cats are the two species you're most likely to encounter. We've grouped them here not because of their popularity, however, but rather because they require similar restraint techniques. Let's look at those similarities, and some important differences, starting with man's best friend.

Dogs

Of all the species you'll encounter, the dog will likely display the greatest range of reactions to restraint and handling. Some dogs are calm and cooperative; others respond aggressively. These reactions can differ from the dog's customary demeanor. Often a dog that's docile and friendly at home reacts differently in a veterinary hospital. In your previous study unit, you learned some signs that a fearful or aggressive dog may display. Keep these in mind when handling and restraining any dog.

Equipment

Collars and leashes. Any dog you're handling should wear at least a collar, which allows easier control should the dog suddenly begin to resist. Several types of collars serve this purpose. Remember, whichever you choose, any collar must be the correct size. Most dogs can easily slip out of a collar that's too large, and risk injury from a collar that's too small. (A growing puppy should receive new collars to accommodate its changing size.)

Types of collars and leashes. *Training collars* consist of stainless-steel links with a ring at each end (Figure 1A). The links can be a variety of thicknesses. In general, the thicker links are used for very large, muscular dogs, while thinner links are best for smaller breeds. Training collars are sometimes incorrectly referred to as “choke” collars. A properly-used training collar never chokes the animal. You must, however, apply it correctly to avoid injuring the dog. Choose a collar approximately two inches longer than the circumference of the dog’s neck. The collar should slip easily but snugly over the dog’s head (Figure 1B). The loose end, which takes the leash, should come over the back of the dog at the top of, not underneath, its neck (Figure 1C). Once the collar and leash are in the appropriate position, you can lead the animal, but never pull the collar tight. Apply short, firm tugs that momentarily tighten the collar. Never leave a training collar on an unattended dog. These collars catch easily on cage bars and similar surfaces, and thus can seriously injure or kill a dog.

Nylon or leather flat collars are most appropriate for daily home use. However, don’t rely on a flat collar for restraint; dogs can easily slip out of them, and some flat collars are designed to release quickly so that they don’t catch on something and choke the dog.

Any dog you’re leading should wear a leash (Figure 2). Leashes can also aid restraint, and help to prevent animal-to-animal contact in the waiting room. There are many kinds of dog leashes on the market. Veterinary practices often use a *slip leash*, one made of flat or braided nylon with a metal ring at one end, on all patients. A slip leash applied prior to examination may help to control a dog that resists handling or escapes from its handler. A dog wearing a slip leash is also easier to remove from a cage. Apply the slip leash as you would a training collar. Many veterinary practices imprint these inexpensive leashes with their practice name and give them as gifts to new clients.

FIGURE 1—Correct Method of Applying a Training Collar



(A)



(B)



(C)

FIGURE 2—Always use a leash when leading dogs through the veterinary clinic.



Leashes are also made of rope, nylon, chain, or leather, with clips to attach directly to a collar. Leather leashes tend to be quite expensive and are rarely used in veterinary practice.

Leashes come in many thicknesses and lengths. Always use thicker leashes on large dogs. A thinner leash may break if a large dog pulls against it. Shorter leashes are appropriate for moving animals from place to place in the veterinary practice; longer leashes allow the animal to exercise.

Muzzles. A *muzzle* is any device applied around an animal's nose and mouth to prevent the animal from biting. Any dog that may become aggressive during examination or treatment should wear a muzzle, applied before the animal shows signs of fear or aggression. Muzzle application can also temporarily distract a dog and allow you to complete a procedure. Several types of muzzles are available; you can also improvise a muzzle out of available materials. Whatever muzzle you choose, take care that you don't put it on any dog with signs of breathing difficulties or chest injury. Also, make sure that you don't leave the muzzle on too long. Some muzzles prevent a dog from panting, which it must do to avoid overheating. Muzzles left in place too long can also injure the dog. Finally, a dog that vomits while wearing a muzzle is likely to aspirate the vomit.

Plastic, leather, or wire-basket muzzles are available in a variety of sizes. This last type of muzzle is a small cup placed over the end of the dog's nose and clipped behind its ears. Because these muzzles allow the dog to pant, you can leave them on longer; some dogs, however, are able to bite through this type of muzzle.

Nylon muzzles, more common in veterinary practice, slip over the dog's nose and clip behind the head (Figure 3). Some nylon muzzles aren't adjustable, but most veterinary practices keep enough sizes of them on hand to make the correct size always available. Ensure the muzzle you choose fits snugly but isn't overly tight. Wash the muzzle promptly after you remove it.



FIGURE 3—Dog Wearing Nylon Muzzle

When you don't have a commercial muzzle, you can improvise your own from available materials. If the dog has a nylon or leather leash attached to its collar, create a temporary muzzle by wrapping a portion of the leash around the animal's mouth (Figure 4). Take care not to pull the leash tightly. The leash should be just tight enough to keep the animal from opening its mouth.

FIGURE 4—Muzzle Made from a Leash



You can also make a muzzle out of gauze roll bandage. To make a gauze muzzle,

Step 1: Take a long piece of bandage and tie a large loop at its midsection (Figure 5A).

FIGURE 5A—To make a muzzle out of gauze bandage, take a long piece of bandage and tie a large loop at its midsection.



Step 2: Approach the dog from the side or back and slip the loop over the end of the dog's nose (Figure 5B).



FIGURE 5B—Approach the dog from the side or back and slip the loop over the end of the dog's nose.

Step 3: Quickly tighten the loop and bring the ends of the gauze under the dog's neck (Figure 5C).

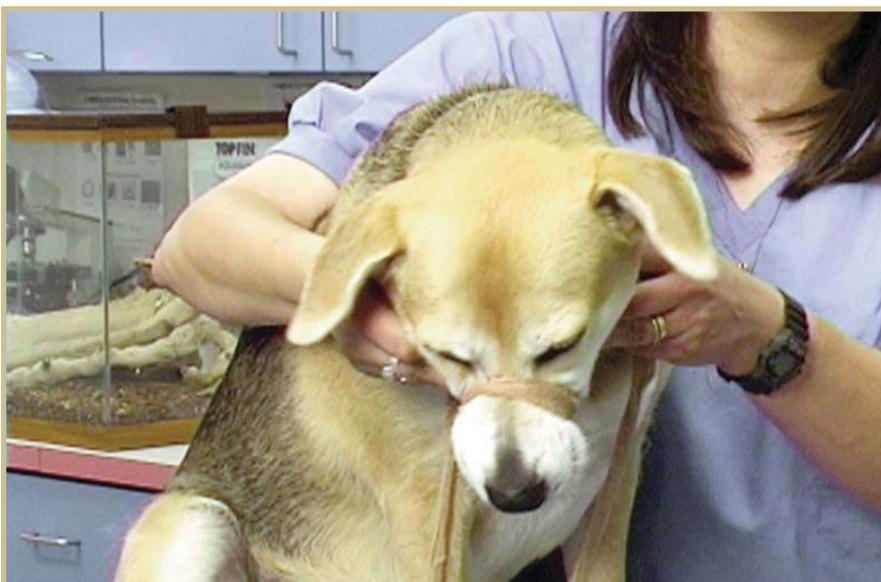


FIGURE 5C—Quickly tighten the loop and bring the ends of the gauze under the dog's neck.

Step 4: Cross the ends over, then pull the ends behind the dog's neck (Figure 5D).

FIGURE 5D—Cross the ends over, then pull the ends behind the dog's neck.



Step 5: Tie the ends of the gauze in a half bow or slip knot so that it can be removed quickly (Figure 5E).

FIGURE 5E—Tie the ends of the gauze in a half bow or slip knot so that it can be removed quickly.



You must modify this technique for dogs with short or pug noses. For pug-nosed dogs, slip the loop over the dog's nose with the tie under the jaw. Pull the ends of the gauze behind the ears, then tie them securely. One of the ends of the gauze should then be drawn down across the dog's forehead and slid under the loop at the top of the nose, to keep the loop from slipping off the end of the dog's nose.

Head snares. Vicious dogs should be caught and restrained with a head snare, sometimes called a “rabies pole” or a “restraint pole” (Figure 6A). The head snare is a long metal or heavy-duty plastic tubular handle with a thick retractable wire inside it. This wire is long enough for a large loop of it to be pulled out, slipped over the dog's head, and quickly tightened (Figure 6B). The snare handle allows you to keep the animal at a safe distance (Figure 6C). Once the snare has served its purpose, a quick release mechanism loosens the loop for easy removal from the dog's neck. Dogs that are especially strong may require two handlers, each with a head snare attached to the animal, to lead the dog. Make sure that the snare will release easily when necessary.



FIGURE 6A—Head Snare

FIGURE 6B—A large loop should be slipped over the dog’s head and tightened.



FIGURE 6C—The handle keeps the animal at a safe distance.



Approaching a Dog

Whenever possible, allow a dog to approach you first. Often a fearful dog simply needs reassurance that you aren't a threat. Crouch or kneel down on the floor and coax the dog slowly (Figure 7). Verbally reassure the dog with a calm, cheerful tone of voice. Allow the dog to approach voluntarily. If you must approach a dog, always do so carefully and slowly. Make sure that the dog can both see and hear you coming. Observe the dog closely for any signs of fear or aggression. Slowly hold out your hand, making sure that your hand is no higher than the dog's nose. The dog may perceive gestures above its nose as threatening, and respond aggressively. Above-the-nose gestures include bending over the dog or attempting to pat its head when it's still unsure of you. Once the dog has approached you and is accepting your handling without signs of fear, you may slip a leash over its neck or lift it onto the examination table.

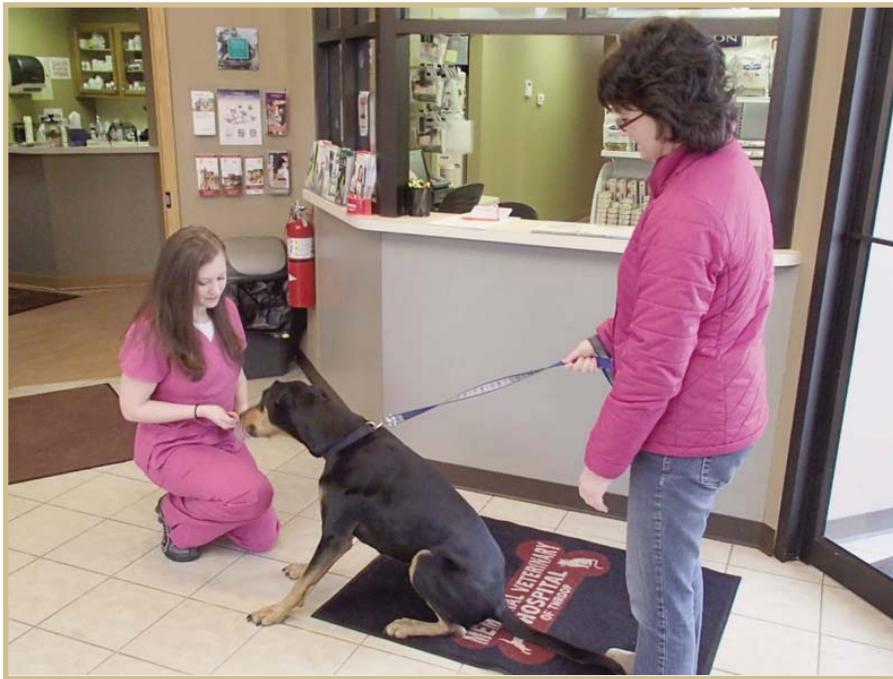


FIGURE 7—Reassure a dog that you're not a threat by kneeling on the floor and coaxing the dog forward slowly.

Picking up and carrying a dog. The proper method of picking up and carrying a dog depends upon the dog's size and health. Two prerequisites before picking up a dog: apply a leash, and crouch beside the animal. The leash helps prevent the dog from escaping. The crouch spares your back.

Lifting even a small dog from a standing position can injure your back. To lift a small, uninjured dog, which weighs less than 50 lbs,

Step 1: Place one arm under the dog's head.

Step 2: Place your other arm under the dog's abdomen with your hand pointed forward and your fingers between the dog's front legs.

Step 3: Lift the dog straight up and place it on the examining table.

You can even carry small dogs in this position. To lift a small dog that's injured or may be injured,

Step 1: Place one arm under the dog's head (Figure 8A).

FIGURE 8A—To lift a small dog that may be injured, begin by placing one arm under the dog's head.



Step 2: Place your other arm around the dog's hindquarters (Figure 8B).



FIGURE 8B—Place your other arm around the dog's hindquarters.

Step 3: Lift the dog straight up and place it on the examining table (Figure 8C).



FIGURE 8C—Lift the dog straight up and place it on the examining table.

Two people are needed to lift dogs that weigh over 50 lbs. Also, because many dogs are unaccustomed to being lifted, they often struggle. Dogs that struggle should also be lifted by two people.

To lift a large, uninjured dog that weighs over 50 lbs or is struggling,

Step 1: Two people should crouch down on the same side of the dog (Figure 9A).

FIGURE 9A—Two people should crouch down on the same side of the dog.



Step 2: One person should restrain the dog's head by placing one arm around the dog's neck and the other arm around the dog's chest (Figure 9B).



FIGURE 9B—One person should restrain the dog's head by placing one arm around the dog's neck and the other arm around the dog's chest.

Step 3: The second person should place one arm around the dog's abdomen and the other arm around the dog's hindquarters (Figure 9C).



FIGURE 9C—The second person should place one arm around the dog's abdomen and the other arm around the dog's hindquarters.

Step 4: Simultaneously, both people should lift the dog using their legs, not their backs (Figure 9D).

FIGURE 9D—*Simultaneously, both people should lift the dog using their legs, not their backs.*



Taking a dog from its owner. Some dogs are very protective of their owners, and may respond more aggressively than they would in the owner's absence. Follow the same approaching guidelines when you approach a dog that's with its owner, but also make sure that you talk in a reassuring tone to both dog and owner. Be especially careful not to make sudden movements. Look at the dog, but don't stare. Some dogs interpret staring as a threat or challenge.

Take the dog's leash from its owner and ask the owner to walk away from the dog. If you must lead the dog away from the owner, coax the dog with a cheerful and calm tone.

Removing a dog from a cage. Before you remove a dog from a cage, find out if the dog can stand and walk. If it can, and it has no neck, throat, or aggressiveness problems, partially open the cage door and put a slip leash around the dog's neck (Figure 10). The leash prevents the dog from escaping once the cage door is fully opened; it also permits some control should the dog become aggressive. To slide a slip leash



FIGURE 10—To remove a dog from its cage, partially open the door and slip a leash around the dog's neck.

over the dog's neck without fully opening the cage door, wait at the front of the cage and let the dog approach you. If the dog is small and docile, grasp it by placing one arm under its body and the other arm under its neck (Figure 11). Place the slip leash while holding the dog in this position. If the dog is small but aggressive, place a blanket or towel around it before lifting.



FIGURE 11—To pick up a small, docile dog from its cage, grasp it by placing one arm under its body and the other under its neck.

Uncaging larger, more aggressive dogs usually requires special handling. Many veterinary practices keep these dogs leashed, with the leash slipped through the bars of the cage door, which allows the handler to move the dog toward the door by gently pulling the leash. This technique keeps the door between the handler and a dog that may try to bite.

If the dog can't walk or stand, a leash is unnecessary; gently lift the dog from the cage. For animals with neck or throat problems, use a chest harness instead of a leash. You may also need to remove the leash and apply a harness if the leash interferes with a medical device, like an intravenous catheter, to be placed in the dog's jugular vein.

Restraint Techniques

The appropriate restraint method for a dog depends upon what the veterinarian is doing, and upon its overall temperament. Veterinarians perform most dog examinations and treatments on a table; your job is to keep the dog in position.

Standing restraint. Veterinarians often complete routine physical examinations with the dog standing. To maintain a dog in a standing position,

Step 1: Place one hand in front of the dog's neck (Figure 12A).

FIGURE 12A—Place one hand in front of the dog's neck.



Step 2: Place the other hand under the dog's abdomen just in front of its rear legs (Figure 12B).



FIGURE 12B—Place the other hand under the dog's abdomen just in front of its rear legs.

Step 3: Gently pull the dog toward you until it's snug against your body (Figure 12C).



FIGURE 12C—Gently pull the dog toward you till it's snug against your body.

Hold this position until the examination is complete. As usual, practice the minimum necessary restraint; being held too tightly can make some dogs fearful.

A variation of this standing-restraint technique is to place your second arm around the dog's hindquarters rather than under its abdomen. While this technique gives you more control over the dog, it may interfere with some procedures, like rectal examination.

Sitting restraint. Some dogs require restraint firmer than you can obtain with the standing position. For these dogs, you can employ sitting restraint. The sitting position is also appropriate for most routine injections and some minor technical procedures. To perform sitting restraint on a dog,

Step 1: Place your arm around the dog's hindquarters (Figure 13A).

FIGURE 13A—To maintain a dog in a sitting position, place your arm around the dog's hindquarters.



Step 2: Gently tuck the dog into a sitting position (Figure 13B).



FIGURE 13B—Gently tuck the dog into a sitting position.

Step 3: Place your other arm around the dog's neck so that its head rests in the crook of your elbow (Figure 13C).



FIGURE 13C—Place your other arm around the dog's neck so that its head rests in the crook of your elbow.

Step 4: Pull the dog snugly against your body (Figure 13D).

FIGURE 13D—Pull the dog snugly against your body.



Take care not to place your head close to the dog's mouth; the animal might start snapping during the procedure.

Reclining restraint. The veterinarian may frequently request that the dog be maintained using reclining restraint (also called *lateral recumbency*) (Figure 14A). To perform reclining restraint on a dog,

FIGURE 14A—The veterinarian will frequently request that the dog be maintained using reclining restraint.



Step 1: After lifting the dog onto the table, place the dog on its side (Figure 14B).



FIGURE 14B—After lifting the dog onto the table, place the dog on its side.

Step 2: Stand behind the dog so that the dog's spine is against the front of your body (Figure 14C).



FIGURE 14C—Stand behind the dog so that the dog's spine is against the front of your body.

Step 3: Grasp the dog's forelegs with one hand, securing your grip by placing one finger between the legs (Figure 14D).

FIGURE 14D—Grasp the dog's forelegs with one hand, securing your grip by placing one finger between the legs.



Step 4: Press down slightly with your forearm on the base of the dog's neck (Figure 14E). Use your other hand to grasp the dog's rear legs (Figure 14F).

FIGURE 14E—Press down slightly with your forearm on the base of the dog's neck.





FIGURE 14F—Use your other hand to grasp the dog's rear legs.

Restraining puppies. You can restrain puppies much as you would adult dogs, but with a much gentler touch. Whenever possible, remove the bitch from the room before any examination or treatment of her puppies. If for some reason you can't remove the bitch, keep her puppies as calm as possible. A puppy that makes vocal signs of pain or distress may cause the bitch to attack.

Restraint of injured or ill dogs. Handle a severely ill or injured dog as if it's likely to bite. Many times a severely injured or ill animal responds out of extreme pain, and biting is a dog's major defense against pain. Take extra precautions when handling any injured animal. To prevent a human injury, place a muzzle on an injured animal. You may, if necessary, place a towel or blanket over a particularly violent animal to calm it. Just make sure you move the dog to a proper examination area promptly—this draping technique often produces only a brief period of calm.

Dog restraint for venipuncture. *Venipuncture*, puncturing a vein to collect blood or administer medication, requires careful and firm restraint. A dog that struggles during venipuncture could damage the vein. Restraint techniques for venipuncture vary depending upon the vein. A dog's most common venipuncture sites are the *cephalic vein*, along the front of the dog's foreleg (Figure 15); the *saphenous vein*, on the outer surface of the dog's hindleg (Figure 16); and the *jugular vein*, on the front of the dog's neck (Figure 17). Venipuncture restraint requires careful positioning so that the vein is accessible and the dog can't move. You may also be expected to *occlude* the vein (block the vein's circulation by pressing on it with your finger). Occluding or "holding off" the vein pools blood in the vein, allowing it to be easily seen and felt. Occluding the vein also provides enough blood for proper venipuncture.

FIGURE 15—Cephalic Vein Site



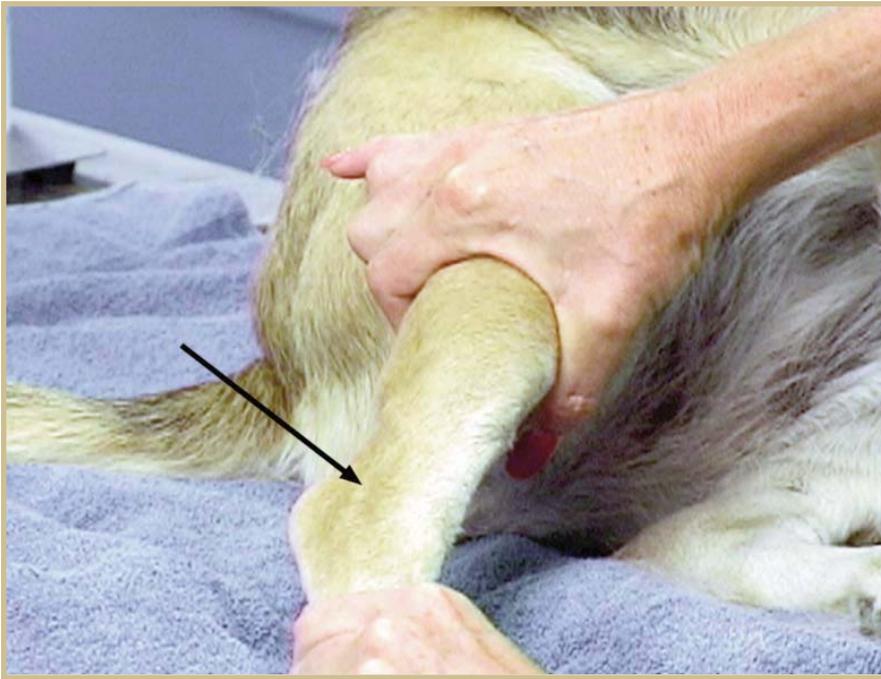


FIGURE 16—Saphenous Vein Site



FIGURE 17—Jugular Vein Site

A dog undergoing cephalic venipuncture is usually placed on its *sternum* (breastbone) on the examination table, its forelegs extending slightly over the table's edge (Figure 18A). This type of restraint is called *sternal recumbency*. To restrain a dog for cephalic venipuncture,

FIGURE 18A—A dog undergoing cephalic venipuncture is usually placed on its sternum (breastbone) on the examination table, its forelegs extending slightly over the table's edge.



Step 1: Stand at the side of the table, facing in the same direction as the dog.

Step 2: Grasp the dog under its neck so that its head rests in the crook of one elbow (Figure 18B).

FIGURE 18B—Grasp the dog under its neck so that its head rests in the crook of one elbow.



Step 3: Place your other arm across the dog's back and pull the dog snugly against your body (Figure 18C).



FIGURE 18C—Place your other arm across the dog's back and pull the dog snugly against your body.

Step 4: Extend the same arm to grasp the dog's opposite forelimb at elbow level with your right hand.

Step 5: Hold the forelimb at the elbow and use your thumb to occlude the vein by pressing in and slightly to the side (Figure 18D).



FIGURE 18D—Hold the forelimb at the elbow and use your thumb to occlude the vein by pressing in and slightly to the side.

The dog's elbow should be at the table's edge, which allows the veterinarian or veterinary technician to grasp the dog's foot and complete the venipuncture (Figure 18E). Should the dog struggle, reassure it with a firm voice and hold it a bit more tightly. You may also try distracting the dog by lightly scratching the side of its head with your left hand (Figure 18F).

FIGURE 18E—The dog's elbow should be at the table's edge.



FIGURE 18F—You may also try distracting the dog by lightly scratching the side of its head with your left hand.



The dog may experience momentary pain when the vein is punctured. Don't release the animal from your grasp, or remove your hand from its leg, until the venipuncturist tells you to (Figure 18G). A veterinarian or veterinary technician withdrawing blood or administering medication will tell you when it's time to release the occlusion of the vein.



FIGURE 18G—Don't release the animal from your grasp, or remove your hand from its leg, until the venipuncturist tells you to.

Once the needle is removed from the vein, maintain your grasp on the leg and place your thumb over the injection site to prevent further bleeding. Applying pressure at this site helps the blood to clot.

Step 6: Maintain your grasp on the leg and simply lift your thumb straight off it. Place your thumb over the injection site while applying pressure. Continue to hold the dog firmly.

Step 7: Once the procedure is complete, slowly loosen your grip. Maintain moderate restraint to keep the dog from jumping off the table.

Restraint for saphenic venipuncture often requires that the dog be restrained in the lateral recumbent position (as do some x-ray examinations and technical procedures). To restrain a dog for saphenous venipuncture,

Step 1: Position the dog in lateral recumbency (Figure 19A).

FIGURE 19A—Position the dog in lateral recumbency.



Step 2: Grasp the upper rear leg just below the knee so that the skin over the vein is pulled tight to occlude the vein and prevent it from “rolling” while venipuncture is being made (Figures 19B and 19C).

FIGURE 19B—Grasp the upper rear leg just below the knee so that the skin over the vein is pulled tight to occlude the vein.





FIGURE 19C—Grasping the leg in this way also prevents it from “rolling” while venipuncture is being made.

Step 3: Release the vein when directed by the veterinarian or veterinary technician. By using this procedure, medication can be administered or a catheter can be passed into the vein.

Step 4: Apply pressure to the venipuncture site to allow a clot to form and bleeding to completely stop (Figure 19D).



FIGURE 19D—Apply pressure to the venipuncture site to allow a clot to form and bleeding to completely stop.

Step 5: Once the procedure is complete, maintain moderate restraint to keep the dog from jumping off the table.

It's often helpful, should the dog struggle in this position, to raise the legs closest to the table so that they cross the upper legs.

Jugular venipuncture, like cephalic venipuncture, positions the dog on its sternum at the table's edge with its forelegs extending off the table (Figure 20A). To restrain a dog for jugular venipuncture,

FIGURE 20A—Jugular venipuncture, like cephalic venipuncture, positions the dog on its sternum at the table's edge with its forelegs extending off the table.



- Step 1:** Stand alongside the dog and place your right hand under its muzzle.
- Step 2:** Point the dog's head toward the ceiling. You may have to hold the dog's mouth closed with your hand (Figure 20B).



FIGURE 20B—*Point the dog's head toward the ceiling. You may have to hold the dog's mouth closed with your hand.*

- Step 3:** With your left hand, grasp the dog's front legs just above the feet and hold them together. Secure your grip by placing a finger between them (Figure 20C).

FIGURE 20C—With your left hand, grasp the dog's front legs just above the feet and hold them together, securing your grip by placing a finger between them.



Step 4: Pull the feet slightly to align them with the dog's nose. The venipuncturist will normally occlude the vein without further assistance (Figure 20D).

FIGURE 20D—Pull the feet slightly to align them with the dog's nose. The venipuncturist will normally occlude the vein without further assistance.



Step 5: Once the procedure is finished, apply pressure to the venipuncture site.

Bring on the dogs—you've now covered the basics of dog restraint. However, what about cats? If you've spent any time around them at all, you know some of the challenges cats present. It isn't easy, but yes, it's possible to restrain our feline friends.

Before moving on to cat restraint, take a few moments to complete *Self-Check 2*.



Self-Check 2

1. A dog shouldn't wear a muzzle if it
 - a. could become aggressive during examination or treatment.
 - b. shows signs of breathing problems or chest injury.
 - c. has a long nose.
 - d. struggles during a procedure.
2. *True or False?* The best way to accustom a puppy to wearing a collar is to put a training collar on the puppy and leave it there.
3. Occluding a vein for venipuncture
 - a. allows sufficient blood to pool in the venipuncture site.
 - b. allows the blood to flow freely through the vein.
 - c. calms the animal so it doesn't struggle and damage the vein.
 - d. All of the above
4. *True or False?* Whenever possible, always be sure to approach a dog first before it has a chance to approach you.
5. Briefly explain the steps for fashioning a muzzle out of gauze roll bandage.

6. Name two reasons for leading dogs on leashes in a veterinary office.

7. Which of the following is the *minimum* weight of a dog, in lbs, requiring two people to lift it?
 - a. 25
 - b. 50
 - c. 75
 - d. 100
8. *True or False?* A training collar is most appropriate for everyday home use.
9. Which of the following types of dog restraint would be used to give a routine injection?
 - a. Lateral recumbency
 - b. Standing restraint
 - c. Sternal recumbency
 - d. Sitting restraint
10. *True or False?* You should remove the bitch from the examination room before the treatment or examination of her puppies.

Check your answers with those on page 137.