

Proper restraint of a patient allows for the effective treatment of the patient but also the safety of the patient and the handler. Proper restraint techniques are an absolutely vital skill for every veterinary technician.

## Dogs

Most dogs are well behaved, well socialized family pets and can be easily handled. However, even the best trained dog may bite when he or she is painful or feels threatened. The first step towards appropriate dog restraint is recognizing behavior cues.

### A Happy or Sociable Dog May:

- **Have its head up** above its shoulders
- Seem **interested in its surroundings**
- **Wag** its tail
- Have **ears up** or forward
- Be **willing/eager to be greeted** and petted
- Continue to **follow its owner commands**
- Make **eye contact but quickly look away**

### A Fearful or Nervous Dog May:

- **Cower** or alternately be **unruly**
- **Whine or cry**
- **Shake**
- **Avoid eye contact**
- Keep its **tail tucked** between its legs
- Hold its **ears flat or back**
- **Crouch or refuse to sit**
- **Try to flee** when approached
- Be **willing to allow contact** if approached **slowly**
- **Refuse** to make **eye contact**
- **Urinate**

### An Aggressive Dog May:

- Have its **head at shoulder level**
- **Growl or bark**
- **Hold its tail straight** in-line with the spine
- Hold its **ears up and forward**
- **Lunge or Attempt to bite** when approached
- Have its **hackles raised**
- **Challenge by making eye contact**
- Have an **aggressive posture with shoulders forward**

## Handling Dogs

**Not every dog will respond in the same way** to handling. Above all else, **rough handling should be avoided** as this may lead even a good dog to bite in an attempt to defend itself.

## When Attempting to Restrain One Should:

- Use the **least amount of restraint necessary** for patient and staff safety
- **Stay calm** and relaxed
- Be **firm but not aggressive**
- Remember that even **very good dogs may bite/resist** if something is **painful**
- Use a **muzzle for painful procedures** (unless the patient has head or neck trauma), muzzles should never be left on for more than 15 minutes without giving the dog a break
- **Avoid handling injured areas**
- Use **caution with older or arthritic** dogs
- **Attempt to comfort** the animal, either through **petting** and/or **verbal reassurance**
- Consider **having the owner leave the room** as the patient may feel the **need to protect their owner**, become more distressed if it senses its owner's distress, also dogs may behave better without their owners present
- **Do not allow an owner to restrain their own fearful or aggressive dog as this may lead to the owner being injured or bit**
- Consider giving **pain medication if the patient is painful** or if pain is expected to be induced during a procedure
- Consider **chemical restraint/sedation if the patient is overly aggressive, nervous, or difficult to handle** as it may be safer for both the patient and the handler
- Always remember that **your safety is of the utmost importance**
- Keep head above one's shoulders

## Restraint Tools Include:

- **Flat leashes** – short leashes that have a choker type loop at one end. used to lead a dog but also as a “lasso” to remove a fearful/cage protective animal from a kennel
- **Choker collars** – when used properly, can be an effective tool, should never be continually kept tight, should not be used in patients with neck or back pain
- **Harnesses** – are very useful in small dogs or in dogs that have tracheal/neck problems as a “handle” by which the dog can be controlled
- **Muzzles** – should be used whenever a painful procedure is attempted or the patient has previously demonstrated aggressive or nervous behavior, can be canvas, leather or made using a flat leash or gauze, may have a calming effect on a dog
- **E-collar** – very useful in brachycephalic dogs (pugs etc.) that are difficult to muzzle, will keep the mouth away from the handler
- **Blankets/towels** – very useful for removing small dogs from kennels by wrapping the blanket around the animal and lifting them out
- **Cage door** – can be used as a “squeeze cage” with extremely aggressive animals in order to sedate them, extreme caution should be used with this technique
- **Capture pole/rabies pole** – should only be used in extreme cases where there is a definite danger to staff
- The **most important restraint tool** for an aggressive or fearful dog is an **experienced technician**

## Cats

Felines will not respond to the same restraint techniques as dogs. **Cats tend to be more nimble and quick than dogs**, more likely to be fearful in a hospital setting and **bite/scratch wounds from cats are more likely to become infected**.

## A Happy or Sociable Cat May:

- Be less likely than a dog to continue to be so once brought into the hospital
- **Walk out of a carrier and explore** an exam room
- **Vocalize but not in a distressed manner**
- Have its **head and tail up**
- **Respond positively to petting**

## A Fearful or Nervous Cat May:

- **Huddle in its carrier** or under a towel, having to be forcible removed
- **Yowl or Hiss**
- **Urinate or defecate** in the carrier
- Attempt to **grab or hold onto the nearest person**
- **Attempt to escape**, especially if cornered
- Pant from stress

## An Aggressive Cat May:

- **Hiss, Yowl, or Scream**
- Pin its **ears back**
- **Lunge with its claws** at moving objects or people
- **Attempt to bite** when picked up
- Try to **kick with its legs** when restrained
- Have its **hackles** and fur on its tail **raised**
- **Swish the tail** back and forth
- **Attempt to escape**, especially if cornered
- Pant from stress

## Handling Cats

### When Attempting to Restrain One Should:

- Use the **least amount restraint necessary** for patient and staff safety
- **Stay calm** and relaxed
- Be **firm but not aggressive**
- Only **attempt when all participants** are ready as some cats have a **limited amount of time they will tolerate** handling
- **Close all doors and windows**
- **Allow the cat to leave its cage or carrier of its own volition if possible**
- Watch carefully for **warning signs** (beginning to **growl, swishing the tail**) as unlike dogs, cats rarely attack without warning
- **Do not allow an owner to restrain their own fearful or aggressive cat as this may lead to the owner being injured or bit**
- **Scruffing the cat by the neck is an excellent way to control the cat without hurting it**
- Consider giving pain medication if the patient is painful or if pain is expected to be induced during a procedure
- Consider **chemical restraint/sedation if the patient is overtly aggressive, nervous, or difficult to handle** as it may be safer for both the patient and the handler
- Always remember that **your safety is of the utmost importance**

## Restraint Tools Include:

- **Towels/blankets** – can be very useful in removing cats from cages, also can be used to wrap a cat to control the legs
- **Cat restraint bag** (aka “cat bag”) – usually a nylon bag that a cat can be placed in to control the legs, can be difficult to initially get the cat inside, must be careful to not get fur/skin caught in the zippers
- **Protective gloves** – can reduce the likelihood of a serious scratch but cat teeth are sharp enough to penetrate them, can make it more difficult to grasp the scruff of the neck, can lead to applying too much pressure due to the inability to feel the cat through the gloves
- **Flat leashes** – can be used with caution when removing a cat from a lower cage
- **Muzzles** – useful to prevent bites but also to cover the cat's eyes and reduce stress
- **E-collar** – will keep the mouth away from the handler though because cats are more agile, they are more likely to remove them
- The **most important restraint tool is an experienced technician** as cats are typically much more difficult to handle than dogs