

Preventing Heat Stroke in Dogs

Heat Exhaustion and Stroke Research compiled by Joanne Johnson, GC Greenville Rep

Greyhounds overheat because their mechanisms for losing heat are overwhelmed by the factors tending to warm them up. A Greyhound loses heat by radiating heat from the skin, by losing warm urine, feces and saliva, but mainly by evaporating water from moisture from the lungs, airway and mouth by panting. Think how cold you can get on a hot day by standing about wet after swimming, as the water evaporates from your skin.

This system works extremely efficiently, but if the external pressures are too high, such as if the outside temperature is too high or high air humidity slows the rate of evaporation of moisture, then inevitably the control mechanisms will become overloaded and even more rapid panting eventually isn't sufficient to keep the body temperature within the normal range. Note that **ONLY** water and heat are lost during this process – not electrolytes.

Symptoms of Heat EXHAUSTION:

- * Heavy panting, hugging, puffing, or gasping for air
- * Dog may seem anxious
- * The skin on the inside of the ears (and possibly the gums) becomes flushed and red
- * May have bloodshot eyes and/or dilated pupils
- * Dog begins to weave when it walks because of dizziness
- * The dog's tongue looks swollen and his saliva looks foamy and thick or he stops salivating altogether
- * Dog lays down or collapses and can't get up

Symptoms of Heat STROKE:

- * Excessive panting, difficulty breathing
- * Temperature of 106 degrees or above
- * Heart rate twice normal
- * Bright red gums, lips and ears
- * Dry mouth and decreased salivation
- * Depression, lethargic
- * Distracted or staring facial expression with dilated pupils
- * Weaving or wobbly walk, or unable to stand at all (acting drunk)
- * Vomiting and/or bloody diarrhea
- * Dehydration (pulled skin around the neck stays up - hunched back end due to muscle cramping)
- * Seizures, unconsciousness, and death

A dog who is in trouble may only have a few of these symptoms. A dog's normal temperature range is about 100 to 102 degrees. At 106 to 110 degrees, dogs will suffer brain damage, organ shut-down and death. A dog that survives such extremes often faces life-long, irreversible health challenges.

What Should I Do If My Dog Overheats?

DON'T immediately race your dog to the vet or call the vet for advice.

COOL your dog off FIRST! Seconds count!!

1. **Move the dog out of the sun** and away from hot pavement and into the shade or into an air-conditioned building. If there is no shade make shade by having someone hold an umbrella or blanket high above him to shade him. Be careful not to block air flow around him though.
2. **Give the dog water if he can drink**. Don't force him to drink if he can't on his own. The water shouldn't be too cold but any water is better than no water.
3. **Rinse the dog off** either in the bath tub or with a garden hose after letting the water run for a few seconds to cool off. Don't just wet him down keep the cool water running over him – concentrate on the groin area and the neck between the front legs and the feet. If using a bathtub or kiddie pool keep the water moving to move the heat away from the dogs skin.

Preventing Heat Stroke in Dogs, continued

If you have access to a rectal thermometer take readings often and remove your dog from the water at 104 degrees. (Overcooling can be dangerous.)

**** It is important to remember that immersing an overheated animal in ice COLD water makes its blood vessels constrict and may actually slowdown the cooling process. Use cool water if you have it but cold water is better than nothing if it is all you have.**

4. If you don't have access to running water try using these:

- * Get the dog damp and in front of an air conditioner, fan or drive with your windows open to the vet.
- * Ice packs wrapped in fabric or cool drink cans from a cooler or Coke machine.
- * Rubbing alcohol from a first aid kit to get his coat damp. It evaporates faster than water and is very cooling, especially on the paws.
- * Wet towels. WARNING: Don't cover the dog with towels for very long! Remove them as soon as they get near the temp of the dog or they will trap the heat and slow down the cooling process.

Go to the vet as soon as your dog is stabilized at about 103 degrees. Roll down your car windows and turn on the air conditioning full-blast. If you have a cell phone, call ahead so that your dog can be rushed in without a wait. Serious internal damage can occur that may not show up for days with heat stroke. It is important to get your dog in for an exam even if it seems fine after it cools off.

Prevention is always best: These are ways to PREVENT heat exhaustion only and ARE **NOT** aggressive enough treatments once heat exhaustion has set in.

Dogs left in hot cars are the number one reason for heat stroke. Even on a cool day a car parked in the sun can heat up quickly.

Choose the cooler part of the days to exercise your dog. If it is still very warm cut the amount of exercise your dog normally does in half or more. Avoid areas near black top on hot days as it can raise the temperature near it. Dogs can also get bad burns on their feet from blacktop.

Remember that excitement, barking and anxiety can cause heat exhaustion with NO exercise. If your dogs is prone to any of these monitor it carefully. Overweight, older and out of shape dogs will suffer from the heat faster than other dogs and should not be exposed to heat for long periods of time and should never be exercised in heat.

Every Greyhound should be well hydrated before traveling or exercising. Although the taste of electrolytes encourages Greyhounds to drink more, the presence of any excess of electrolyte over actual requirements will tend to dehydrate without any of the other causes coming in to play. A splash of milk will work just as well to encourage water intake.

Greyhounds are rarely electrolyte deficient unless they have had severe gut upsets. Plain water is the ideal drink for hot weather. Once dehydration has set in, electrolytes will contribute to excessively high salt levels in the brain, which are dangerous.

Heat loss from the skin can be sped up by either spraying with a light mist of water or draping with a wet sheet, then encouraging air flow over it to aid evaporation. Greyhounds with dark coats absorb more heat than lighter skinned ones, so a light colored, lightweight jacket can reduce overheating in direct sunlight.