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Handling and restraint

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CHAPTER CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

No matter which procedure is to be performed, correct restraint of the patient is essential for the safety and welfare of both the animal and the handler. An animal that is securely and comfortably restrained will suffer less stress and will be less inclined to struggle and escape.

Most animals brought into a veterinary practice are used to being handled and are unlikely to bite or scratch, but you may encounter stray dogs and feral cats that are wary of human contact. Their reaction to restraint may be unpredictable and even dangerous, and you must be mindful of your own safety and take note of how the animal is responding, e.g. if it is obviously very frightened or could be about to snap. Then, having observed the animal's behavioural signs, you must take steps to minimize its fear and distress.

It is important when handling any species of animal that you approach quietly and confidently and perform the technique correctly at the first attempt, not at the third or fourth attempt – nothing upsets an animal more than clumsy, inept handling. You must know how to carry out the procedure, have all the equipment ready to hand and organize assistance if you think you are going to need it. If you need to wear some form of personal protective equipment (PPE), e.g. gauntlets, put them on before you begin the procedure. It is also important to feel confidence in yourself and confident that all this preparation will help. Animals are very sensitive to your mood and may detect your fear and bite you.

In the following descriptions of procedures, it is recognized that minimal restraint is best, if possible, but it may not always be possible, and understanding how to safely exert 'force' is an important part of a veterinary nurse's training. In some cases, restraint may inflame the animal's temper, making things worse, and it is up to you to assess the situation and behave accordingly.

After administering medication to any species of animal, take a few minutes to observe the patient for signs of any adverse reaction. If this occurs, take steps to alleviate the condition and report it to the veterinary surgeon immediately.

(For the purposes of description, the veterinary nurse restrains the patient, while the veterinary surgeon performs the task. In many cases, two nurses or a nurse and the animal's owner can perform the task.)

DOGS

Procedure: Tying a tape muzzle (Fig. 1.1)

This prevents the dog from biting the handler and diverts its attention away from the procedure being carried out.

1. **Action:** Place the dog in a sitting position on the floor.
   Rationale: *In this position the dog is less likely to wriggle or bite. If the dog is small, it may be easier to place it on a table – avoid being bitten while you lift it on to the table.*
2. **Action:** Ask an assistant to stand astride the dog and grasp the scruff on either side of the head just behind the ears.
   Rationale: *If the dog moves its head around, the muzzle cannot be tied quickly. Be careful when scruffing a brachycephalic breed, as there is a risk of prolapsing the eyes.*
3. **Action:** Using a length of cotton tape or bandage, tie a loop in it.
   Rationale: *Any long strip of material can be used, e.g. a tie or even a stocking, but it must be strong enough to hold the jaws together.*
4. **Action:** Approach the dog slowly and deliberately, crouching down to its level.
   Rationale: *Crouching low helps to prevent fear and aggression; standing over the dog may provoke it to jump up and bite.*
5. **Action:** Place the looped tape over the nose and tighten quickly and firmly with the knot over the nose.
   Rationale: *Any delay in tightening the loop may allow the dog to shake its head free.*
6. **Action:** Bring the long ends of the tape down and cross them over under the chin.
   Rationale: *Further throws around the nose before finally crossing over will strengthen the muzzle.*
7. **Action:** Take the two ends of the tape backwards and tie them in a bow behind the ears.
   Rationale: *A bow allows a quick release if the dog becomes distressed.*
8. **Action:** Ask the assistant holding the dog to keep the head pressed downwards.
   Rationale: *This position prevents the dog from lifting its forefeet to pull off the muzzle.*

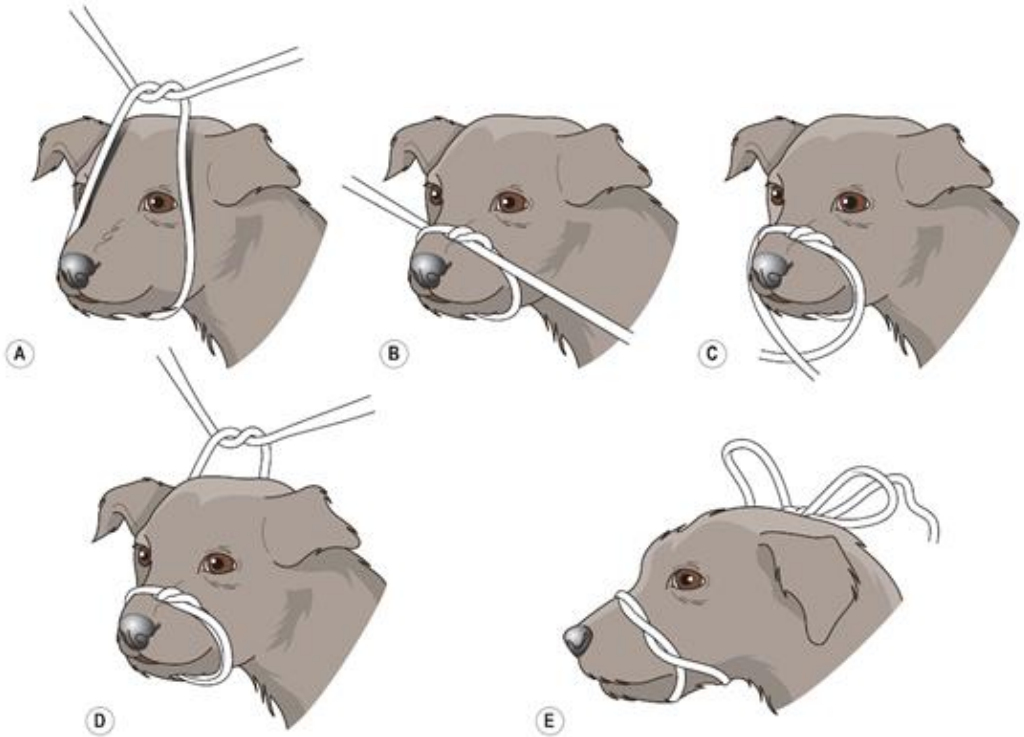

Fig. 1.1 Tying a tape muzzle. (Adapted, with permission, from Veterinary Nursing Medical Textbook, Masters and Bowden (2001), Butterworth-Heinemann.)

9. **Action:** If the dog is a brachycephalic or a short-nosed breed, insert another piece of tape under the loop over the nose and under the piece at the back of the head.
   Rationale: *This prevents the muzzle from slipping off over the short nose.*
10. **Action:** Bring the two ends of this piece together and tie into a bow on the bridge of the nose.
    Rationale: *The dog must be carefully observed, as pressure over the nose may lead to respiratory distress.*
11. **Action:** Never leave a muzzled animal unattended.
    Rationale: *There is a risk of asphyxiation by vomit or saliva.*

There are many types of commercial, washable muzzles on the market that are designed to fit specific sizes of dog. These are very useful and have clasps which make them quick to put on and, more importantly, quick to release if the dog becomes distressed. The downside is that it is expensive to buy a range of different sizes, so make sure you know how to use the cheaper tape muzzle. In an emergency, you can use a tie, a belt or even a stocking!

Procedure: Lifting dogs up to 15 kg bodyweight

(For example, cocker spaniels, beagles, etc.)

1. **Action:** Keep your back straight and, with your legs slightly apart, bend your knees.
   Rationale: *This ensures that the weight of the dog is borne by your spine and your pelvic girdle.*
2. **Action:** Place one arm around the front of the dog's chest and the other around its back end, over the tail.
3. **Action:** Hold the dog close to your chest (Fig. 1.2).
   Rationale: *This will prevent the dog from struggling as it is lifted.*

Fig. 1.2 The main elements of a good lifting technique. (Taken from The Complete Textbook of Veterinary Nursing, Aspinall (2011), Elsevier.)

4. **Action:** Straighten your legs, thereby raising the dog off the ground.
5. **Action:** Place it firmly on the table.
6. **Action:** Do not leave the animal unattended while it is on the table.
   Rationale: *The dog may attempt to jump off the table, injuring itself, and it may then escape.*

Procedure: Lifting dogs over 15 kg bodyweight (Fig. 1.3)

(For example, Labradors, springer spaniels, etc.)

1. **Action:** Arrange for another person to assist you.
   Rationale: *Never attempt to lift a heavy dog by yourself. You may do permanent damage to your back!*
2. **Action:** Both people stand on the same side of the dog.
3. **Action:** Keep your back straight and, with your legs slightly apart, bend your knees.
   Rationale: *This ensures that the weight of the dog is borne by your spine and your pelvic girdle.*
4. **Action:** Take the head end by placing one hand under the chest and the other under the neck.
   Rationale: *If possible, the person lifting the head should be familiar to the dog, e.g. the owner. This reduces the risk of anyone being bitten.*
5. **Action:** Hold the head close to your chest.
   Rationale: *If the head is held close to you, the dog cannot turn its head round to bite.*

Fig. 1.3 Lifting a large dog. (Redrawn from Veterinary Nursing, Lane and Cooper (1994), Butterworth-Heinemann.)

6. **Action:** Instruct your assistant to adopt the safe lifting position (Fig. 1.2).
7. **Action:** Instruct your assistant to place one hand under the abdomen and the other around the back end.
8. **Action:** At the same time, both people straighten their legs and lift the dog on to the table.

Procedure: Lifting small dogs with spinal damage (Fig. 1.4)

(This can also be used for cats.)

1. **Action:** Approach the animal quietly and with care.
   Rationale: *It may be frightened and in extreme pain, leading to unpredictable behaviour.*
2. **Action:** If appropriate, apply a tape muzzle.
   Rationale: *This will prevent the dog biting you as you lift it.*
3. **Action:** With a straight back and bent knees, place your arms around the chest.
4. **Action:** Straighten your knees and lift the animal, allowing the legs to hang downwards.
   Rationale: *This position prevents compression of the spine, which would cause acute pain and further damage.*
5. **Action:** Gently place the animal on its side on a suitable non-slip surface ready for examination.
   Rationale: *Care must be taken to avoid causing further pain.*

Procedure: Lifting large dogs with spinal damage (Fig. 1.5)

1. **Action:** Arrange for another person to assist you.
   Rationale: *Do not attempt to lift a large injured dog by yourself. You may damage your back, get bitten or cause the condition of the patient to deteriorate.*
2. **Action:** Find something that can be used as a 'stretcher', such as a blanket or sheet, an ironing board or a solid plank of wood.
   Rationale: *The dog must be supported on something that prevents compression of the spine, which would cause acute pain and further damage.*
3. **Action:** Approach the animal quietly and with care.
   Rationale: *It may be frightened and in extreme pain, leading to unpredictable behaviour.*
4. **Action:** If appropriate, apply a tape or commercial muzzle (Fig. 1.1).
   Rationale: *This will prevent the dog biting you as you lift it.*

Fig. 1.4 Lifting a small dog with spinal damage. A, Allow the legs to hang downwards. B, Place the animal on its side on the table.

Fig. 1.5 Lifting a large dog with spinal damage.

5. **Action:** With the help of your assistant, and adopting the correct lifting position, lift the dog on to the blanket or plank.
6. **Action:** If using a plank, tie the dog on to it using tapes or bandages.
   Rationale: *This will prevent the dog from falling or jumping off the 'stretcher' as you lift it, with the risk of further injury.*
7. **Action:** Gently carry the dog to the table and place it on the table, still on the blanket or plank.
   Rationale: *The 'stretcher' can be removed from under the dog later on.*

RESTRAINT FOR GENERAL EXAMINATION

Procedure: To examine the cranial end of the body

1. **Action:** Using the correct procedure, lift the dog on to a stable examination table covered in a non-slip mat.
   Rationale: *If the table does not shake and the dog's paws do not slip, the dog will feel secure and be less inclined to try and jump off the table.*
2. **Action:** Stand to one side of the dog.
3. **Action:** Place one arm under the dog's neck and pull the head close to your chest with your hand.
   Rationale: *If the head is held firmly against your chest, the dog cannot move to bite you.*
4. **Action:** Place the other arm over the dog's back with your elbow pointing towards the far side.
5. **Action:** Apply pressure with your elbow and forearm along the spine, making the dog sit down.
   Rationale: *In a sitting position, the dog will feel secure.*

Procedure: To examine the caudal end of the body or take the rectal temperature

(Continuing from the previous procedure.)

1. **Action:** Keep one arm under the neck, pulling the head close to your chest.
   Rationale: *If the head is held firmly against your chest, the dog cannot move to bite you.*
2. **Action:** Place the other arm under the abdomen, gently lifting the dog into a standing position.
3. **Action:** Pull the body close to your chest by bringing your forearm up under the abdomen.
   Rationale: *This position holds the dog securely against you, reducing the risk of it biting you and preventing it from moving during the examination.*
4. **Action:** If you are required to restrain the dog for a long period of time, move your hand to lie over the spine, but be careful that the dog does not sit down again.
   Rationale: *This position may be more comfortable for you, while still maintaining control over the dog.*
5. **Action:** If the dog starts to move or object to the examination, quickly return to the previous position.
   Rationale: *You must be aware of the dog's 'mood' and respond quickly to prevent anyone being bitten.*

Procedure: To examine the dog on its side or to provide stronger control (Fig. 1.6)

1. **Action:** Apply a tape or commercial muzzle if appropriate.
   Rationale: *This method is used to restrain more difficult dogs, and you should be prepared for an aggressive response.*
2. **Action:** Using the correct lifting procedure, lift the dog and place it on a stable table covered in a non-slip mat.
   Rationale: *If the table does not shake and the dog's paws do not slip, the dog will feel secure and be less inclined to struggle and escape.*
3. **Action:** With the dog in a standing position, stand to one side of the dog.
4. **Action:** Reach over the dog and grasp the foreleg and hind leg furthest away from you at the level of the radius and tibia.
   Rationale: *It may be difficult to reach over the back of larger dogs, especially if you are short or the table is high.*