

# How to Bandage a Lacerated Footpad or Torn Dewclaw

## BACKGROUND

*Laceration* simply refers to a cut, which can range from a simple and superficial one to a deep gash.

The *dewclaw* is the claw on the inner surface of the paw, like the thumb in a person. Most dogs and cats have them on the front paws, and most dogs (but not cats) have them on the hind paws as well.

Pets may accidentally cut themselves on the paw when they are outside walking, playing, or hiking, resulting in a laceration or torn dewclaw. Although these injuries can appear serious because they are often quite bloody, they are easy to manage. Applying a bandage is easy to do and can be accomplished at home.

The goal is to stop the bleeding by applying gentle, constant pressure to the area. However, it is also important to ensure that the bandage is not too tight.

## GETTING STARTED

Equipment/materials needed (mostly available at many pharmacies and in first-aid kits):

- Gloves, ideally medical type available at any drugstore
- Bandage tape
- Telfa pad or similar nonstick gauze material (optional)
- Clean, dry, new cotton bandage material. An ideal material is Kling-type stretchable roll gauze.
- Vetrap, Elastikon/Elastoplast, or Ace-type roll of bandage material

A sock, such as a plain terrycloth white sweat sock, can make a useful external covering.

## TROUBLESHOOTING BEFOREHAND

If the bleeding is heavy, it is most important to place a bandage on the paw to control the bleeding. You can then transport your pet to the veterinarian for evaluation. If the bleeding is light, you may clean the wound with an antibacterial soap or a diluted disinfectant solution (Betadine or chlorhexidine are commonly available at pharmacies; dilute 1 part disinfectant to at least 10 parts water before using because undiluted Betadine or chlorhexidine is corrosive to the tissues). Rinse well with lukewarm water, dab the area dry, and apply the bandage. Tape will not stick to a moist haircoat; be sure to dry the area well.

If your pet resists, discontinue the procedure. Place a sock on the foot if needed and proceed to your veterinary hospital. Do not put yourself in harm's way or allow yourself to be bitten.

## PROCEDURE

- Apply two long strips of bandage tape directly to the skin/haircoat of the front and the back of the affected paw, but not on the wound. These strips should run parallel to the length of the limb, beginning at least 6 inches (15 cm) up the paw and extending past the tips of the toes for at least 9 inches (22 cm). These "stirrups" will act to anchor the bandage to the hair and skin.
- Apply a Telfa pad, if available, over the laceration or torn dewclaw. This allows for easy bandage removal.
- Apply a layer of cotton bandage material. Start at the tip of the toes and work your way past the laceration in a spiral (barber pole) pattern. Each loop around the leg should cover 50% of the previous loop of bandage so there is good overlap and no gaps.
- Apply a layer of Vetrap, Elastikon/Elastoplast, or an Ace bandage in similar fashion. Again, start at the tip of the toes and work your way up the leg past the laceration.

- Very important: make sure the bandage is not too tight. If you are applying Vetrap or Elastikon/Elastoplast, prestretch the material by unrolling the whole roll first, then rerolling it before applying. Otherwise, the tension of unrolling the bandage while applying it can create too much tension and cause a squeezing effect on the leg that can deprive it of circulation. As a test: you should be able to insert a small finger under your bandage at the tip of the toes. If not, it is too tight.
- The length of tape you applied in the first step will continue to stick out past the toes and is not covered by the bandage.
- If the laceration affects one of the toes, the bandage should cover it but leave at least one or two other toes on the same foot clear of the bandage. These will be useful for checking periodically that the bandage is not too tight.



Initial steps in bandaging by the veterinarian: the laceration has been closed (black lines in skin are the suture/stitches) and two "stirrups" made of white tape have been applied, one to the front of the paw and one to the back, in order to stabilize the bandage.



Same dog as the previous photo. Now that the bandage has been applied, the tape stirrups are turned outward and stuck to the bandage itself. This prevents the bandage from sliding off the paw like a glove.

- Reflect/turn back the long piece of tape protruding from the toes, and apply it up the leg onto the bandage. This will help prevent the bandage from slipping off the leg.
- Apply additional tape as needed to strengthen the bandage if necessary.

## AFTERWARDS

Always assess your pet's foot for any swelling, because this would be a concern that would justify prompt re-evaluation. The toes should remain exposed past the bandage (exception: toe[s] that is/are lacerated) and will be the first to swell if a bandage is too tight. If the toes swell, remove the bandage and start over. Ensure that all layers are loose enough to prevent this type of swelling (which indicates poor circulation) but not so loose that the bandage slips off.

Your veterinarian may request that you continue to apply bandages to the area for a few days. Make sure the area of skin is always clean and dry prior to bandage application.

If your pet will be going outside, cover the bandage with a plastic bag to prevent any moisture from getting onto the bandage. If the bandage becomes wet, you should change it. Wet bandages promote infection and gangrene.

An Elizabethan collar (E-collar) may be required to prevent your pet from removing the bandage. Do not allow your pet to chew, damage, or eat the bandage. The E-collar must be long enough that the pet cannot extend his/her foot past it to chew on the foot. Make sure, however, your pet can obtain food and water with the E-collar on (such as offering food or water by elevating the bowls by hand). Licking is harmful to a wound; it is a common myth that a dog or cat's tongue is "antiseptic," when in fact the antibodies that do exist on their tongues are no match for the bacteria also carried in the mouth when licking a healing tissue site (increasing the risk of infection).

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### *Why does the area have to be dry before the bandage is applied?*

The area should be dry before applying the bandage because moisture can become trapped in the bandage, which can house and incubate bacteria. Ask your veterinarian how long you will need to continue applying and changing bandages and if you should allow the area to air dry for a few hours prior to reapplying a bandage.

### *What if the swelling is due to the injury, not the bandage?*

Injuries can cause swelling and may need to be examined by the veterinarian. If you have any concern, call your veterinary hospital.

### *Should I apply an antibiotic cream to the affected area of skin?*

Not all lacerations need to have an antibiotic ointment or cream applied. Ask your veterinarian before you apply anything, as this may delay healing.

### *Should I wear gloves when cleaning the affected area of skin?*

Yes, you should always wear gloves when working with any wound. This will prevent you from becoming contaminated with bacteria and will prevent you from contaminating the wound.

## OTHER RELATED INFORMATION SHEET

- [How to Assemble and Use an Elizabethan Collar](#)

Practice Stamp or Name & Address

Also available in Spanish.