

How to Take a Pet's Temperature

BACKGROUND

The body temperature of a pet can easily be measured at home and can be crucial when monitoring a sick patient. A patient's temperature may become elevated due to fever as a result of infection, cancer, or inflammation, or the temperature can be increased due to stress or excitement.

Rectal thermometers are the most accurate thermometers available and are easily obtainable at any pharmacy and many grocery stores. Ear thermometers are also available for pets; except in experienced hands, they do not provide accurate results.

GETTING STARTED

Equipment/materials needed:

- Rectal thermometer
- Vaseline, K-Y jelly, or other medical lubricant

TROUBLESHOOTING BEFOREHAND

It is often helpful to have an assistant to distract your pet. If your pet does not allow you to take his or her temperature, do not force the procedure. Obtaining a temperature from a cat can be more difficult and may take some practice. Be sure to lubricate your thermometer for easier insertion.

PROCEDURE

- In calm pets (especially dogs), this can be done with just one person. For cats or for young, excited animals, it may be necessary to have one person distracting and/or holding the pet while another person inserts the thermometer.
- Digital rectal thermometers are timed and will sound when an accurate temperature has been obtained.
- Avoid mercury thermometers because they can break, not only exposing the animal and you to broken glass but also to toxic mercury.

- Place a small amount of lubricant on the end of the thermometer, lift the tail slightly, and insert the thermometer into the rectum.
- Once the thermometer is in place, let go of the tail. Many pets object more to the tail being held out of the way than to the thermometer being inserted!
- Leave the thermometer in until it beeps that it is done.
- Remove thermometer, wipe off lubricant and any feces, and record the result. Clean the thermometer probe with a disinfecting solution such as rubbing alcohol, and then dry.

AFTERWARDS

Normal temperatures of dogs and cats are generally 101°F to 102°F (38.3°C to 38.9°C), assuming comfortable ambient/room temperature and that the body temperature was not taken immediately after exercise or excitement. Any pet with a temperature over 103°F (39.4°C) should be evaluated further, beginning with a phone call to the veterinarian to determine whether an immediate visit to the veterinary hospital is needed.

Practice Stamp or Name & Address

Also available in Spanish.